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DRAGON®

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ON THE COVER: *Jesper Ejsing illustrates the occultist and the beguiler, two new character themes in this month's issue.*

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Fey Gone Wild

By Christopher Perkins

I consider the Feywild one of the greatest inventions of 4th Edition. It instantly struck me as a place where you can root an entire campaign—or a sizable chunk of one. Earlier editions of the game presented their own variations of the Feywild, but the 4th Edition *Manual of the Planes*™ was the first time the realm of Faerie received the attention it deserved.

The thing I like most about the Feywild is that it spurs creativity rather than constrains it. It can be as wacky and wondrous as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* or as dark and subtle as Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*. Being a world unto itself, it also has its own politics and rivalries, not to mention myriad settings worth exploring.

The first time I dragged my players into the Feywild, I took the subtle approach. They stepped through a portal into a sylvan glade, above which the clouds took the forms of creatures they were soon to encounter: eladrin, goblins, werewolves, harpies, and centaurs. These fluffy portents provided the first clue to the magical wonder of the Feywild . . . and the first sign to the player characters that they weren't in Kansas anymore.

My players didn't stay in the Feywild for more than a few sessions at a time before returning to the natural world, but they found excuses to go back. I think they enjoyed the politics of the eladrin court and the conflict I had set up between the eladrin of Astrazalian and the werewolf clans lurking in the surrounding woods. The heroes also got to thwart goblins determined to invade the natural world through a fey crossing, as well as a pair of conniving firbolg sisters plotting to usurp their father's domain.

The Feywild chapter of the *Manual of the Planes* gave me all the information I needed to create my own rendition of the plane of Faerie. I've since found even more inspiration in *Player's Option: Heroes of the Feywild*™, which contains a surprising amount of additional lore about the fey and their homeland. As my current campaign draws to an end, I find myself thinking about my next campaign, and I'm very tempted to make the Feywild a central element. (Specifically, I've been considering what might happen if the Feywild and the natural world somehow became conjoined or fused into one plane, and the distress that would cause the inhabitants of both planes.)

We've barely scratched the surface when it comes to describing the Feywild and its inhabitants. I feel like there's so much more territory to explore, so many more archfey worth meeting, so many stories yet to tell. This month, we've decided to cross over into the Feywild and meet a few of its inhabitants—some of whom will be familiar to you from previous editions, and others that are new to 4th Edition.

The brownie, the grig, the pixie, and the sylph make surprise comebacks in this month's "Fey of Wood and Wind." We also have two Court of Stars articles featuring denizens of the Feydark (the Feywild's equivalent of the Underdark). Even Ed Greenwood hops on the bandwagon, introducing us to a charming fey lass with a dark agenda.

We recognize that the fey theme isn't for everyone. Hence, we offer two new character themes tied to magic (the occultist) and trickery (the beguiler), as well as an article on playing ghosts. It's a "something for everyone" issue, with goodies for both players and DMs. Leave a comment to let us know what you think!

Fey of Wood and Wind

By Steve Townshend

Illustration by Beth Trott

In old cupboards and walls, beneath the thick underbrush of Faerie forests, in enchanted crystal caves, wee fey make their homes in places the big folk do not tread. High among the drifting clouds above the Feywild, their airy cousins play their way across the skies. Some of these fey folk are shy observers that dwell on the boundaries of mortal domains; others are mischievous tricksters that observe no boundaries whatever. In a land of stories and wishes-come-true, where witches turn heroes into hermit crabs and where eladrin in shining raiment wage war against twisted giants, these fey of wood and wind keep out of sight, often unnoticed by the larger world.

Theirs is not to fight in mighty battles or solve the innumerable riddles of the cosmos. Some such fey were born to beautify the natural landscape and grace the eternal skies; others, to make music and bring good cheer to every creature great and small; the humblest, to mend the tattered edges of others' lives without expectation of thanks or reward.

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Brownies: Live and Let Live

Underfoot and out of sight, the tiny and industrious brownies clean, mend, and protect the dwellings they share.

Brownies dwell in attics and between walls, in cellars and chimneys. They take up residence beneath floorboards, behind furniture, in the gloomy backs of closets, on top of cupboards, under eaves and rafters, and anywhere else they might go unnoticed by the big folk, who live their lives largely unaware of the tiny fey dwelling beside them. When long-lost possessions turn up unexpectedly, houses creak, dogs snuffle excitedly at the walls, and cats paw and purr at the empty air—these are the telltale signs that brownies occupy the dwelling.

Among the meekest of the fey, brownies can barely sustain themselves in a wild and dangerous world. Although some tribes of wild brownies still troop across the land of Faerie, most of those in the natural world are benevolent homebodies that strive to coexist peacefully with the people whose homes they share. Thus they quietly inhabit the houses of larger beings, secretly performing household services in payment for occupying the hidden corners of those structures. Brownies that remain in their native Feywild perform similar tasks in the dens and caves of woodland beasts, and they tidy the glades of fey creatures such as treants, nymphs, or dryads in exchange for friendship and protection.

In the mortal world, brownies are often known as "house elves" or "helpers." Owing to their wingless figures and patched garments, they resemble miniature wood elves more than they do pixies or other sprites. Over time, brownies have developed a special kinship with domestic animals such as cats and dogs, which never attack or threaten them.

Household Protectors: No place is more important to a brownie than the walls of its home. Brownies inhabit all manner of dwellings, from wattle-and-daub cottages to granite-carved castles to merchant wagons and wooden ships. Once a brownie claims a place, it defends its adopted home as staunchly as the owner might—ambushing, tricking, and confounding any creature that dares to threaten the place or its inhabitants. Creatures that enter a brownie's house unbidden often depart in fear, imagining that poltergeists or demons haunt the place.

Helping Hands: Although they prefer to keep out of sight, brownies contribute to the maintenance and upkeep of the homes they choose. They mend shoes, clean walls and windows, repair shingles and hinges, and clear away dust and debris. Brownies ask no payment for their service; selfless labor is their way of life. Being neither great farmers nor expert hunters, they rely on their hosts for an occasional curd of cheese or thimble of milk, some bread crumbs, tools, or scraps of fabric. Brownies never bargain openly for

Bard's Tale: Three Brownies

Once there were three brownies searching for a home. They wandered over hill and dale until they came to a rich manor house.

"Surely we will find a home here," said the brownies. So they entered the manor and settled within its walls. The brownies cleaned the chimneys and swept the floors and cleared the cobwebs and polished the silver, but the rich merchant who lived in the manor was so accustomed to people serving him that he never noticed their labor. And he was so stingy that he never let a stray crumb fall from his plate. The poor brownies starved in the rich man's house, so they soon decided to move on.

Next they came to a smith's house. It was a fine brick building with a gabled roof and many rooms. "Surely we will find a home here," said the brownies. They cleaned the forge, patched the roof, and mended the fence. When the smith saw the work, he suspected that brownies had taken up residence within his walls. He was a greedy man and did not wish to share a scrap with them, so he set ten cats loose in his house to drive the wee folk out. But cats and brownies have always been the dearest friends, so the brownies only smiled and scratched the cats' chins and ears. They understood the smith's intentions all the same, though, and departed his house the next day.

At last the brownies came to the hovel of a poor tailor. It was not much of a home, and the tailor had little to spare. Nevertheless, the brownies stitched his clothes, shored up his drafty walls, and tended his tiny garden. The next morning they woke to discover three thimbles full of warm broth. So there they stayed, full and content.

Not long after, the rich merchant came to the shop of the tailor. He was so fat from eating every last crumb in his house that he had split the seams of all his clothes. So he paid the tailor several pieces of silver to repair them.

Then the greedy smith came to the tailor. He was wearing nothing but a wooden barrel. "These terrible cats have torn up all my clothes!" he cried. Reluctantly, the smith paid the tailor several pieces of silver to mend all his garments.

The tailor used this money to buy a tidy little house in the country, where he made clothes so fine that everyone said they must have been crafted by elves. And perhaps they were.

such things, though, since they are retiring by nature. If they cannot comfortably survive in the place they have chosen, they move on in search of another home with more open-handed inhabitants.

Homeowners who notice the presence of the modest fey would do well not to call attention to them. Contented brownies provide a lifetime of loyal service to a kind landlord who respects their privacy.

A Merry Menace: Whether they live in the comfort of domestic homes or the magical forests of Faerie, brownies retain the wild vivacity of the fey. Although they are peaceful by nature, brownies take great sport in confounding enemies that invade their territory. They steal food, treasure, and weapons, or dismantle armor and tie bootstraps together. They use love charms to embarrass and befuddle their foes, and sleeping charms to render intruders helpless while the brownies strip them bare and remove them from the premises. Brownies might choose to make their presence known by firing a barrage of insults at those they wish to repel. No one who suffers the antics and pranks of a brownie pack soon forgets the experience.

Brownies despise goblins and boggles in particular, and they cut off the fingers of any boggle that reaches into a brownie's home. Goblins and boggles in turn fear brownies, and they hesitate to enter a home where the wee fey are living.

Brownie	**Level 1 Controller**
Tiny fey humanoid	XP 100
HP 28; **Bloodied** 14	**Initiative** +4
AC 15, **Fortitude** 11, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13	**Perception** +7
Speed 5	Low-light vision

Traits

Blend In

A brownie needs only partial cover or partial concealment to attempt a Stealth check to become hidden.

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC

Hit: 1d6 + 6 damage, or 2d6 + 6 damage if the target is granting combat advantage to the brownie, and the brownie can slide the target 1 square.

Move Actions

Dimension Door (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**

The brownie teleports up to 10 squares.

Minor Actions

Disorient (charm) ✦ **At-Will** 1/round

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +4 vs. Will

Hit: Whenever the target moves more than half its speed, it falls prone (save ends).

Ventriloquism (illusion) ✦ **Encounter**

Effect: Ranged 10 (one object, unoccupied square, or creature); the brownie causes a sound as quiet as a whisper or as loud as yelling to emanate from the target. Creatures that fail a DC 12 Insight check think the target made the sound.

Mirror Image (illusion) ✦ **Encounter**

Effect: Three images of the brownie appear in its space, and the brownie gains a +6 power bonus to AC. Each time an attack misses the brownie, one of its images disappears and the bonus granted by this power decreases by 2. When the bonus reaches 0, all the brownie's images are gone and the power ends. Otherwise, the effect lasts for 1 hour.

Skills Stealth +9, Thievery +9

Str 6 (-2)	**Dex** 18 (+4)	**Wis** 14 (+2)
Con 12 (+1)	**Int** 13 (+1)	**Cha** 13 (+1)

Alignment good **Languages** Common, Elven

Equipment short sword

Brownie Familiars

Though most brownies prefer to do their work without any kind of recognition, some have been known to reveal themselves to wizards with whom they dwell. They assist in a multitude of small tasks, from organizing spell components to copying old tomes; a brownie familiar always keeps its wizard's garments and household tidy.

Brownie Familiar	**Familiar**

When the shy brownie appears, it resembles a miniature elf dressed in clothing cobbled together from household bits and bobs.

Senses low-light vision

Speed 5

Constant Benefits

✦ You gain a +2 bonus to Stealth and Thievery checks.

Active Benefits

Unseen Servant: You can use a minor action to turn the familiar invisible. While invisible, the familiar can carry objects that weigh up to 25 pounds, and it can move and manipulate objects at your command.

Grigs: Mischievous Musicians

Tiny sprites with crickets' legs, grigs are the lively minstrels and bards of the wee fey.

On festival nights, eladrin dance in the moonlit glades of Faerie, their graceful feet moving in time to the rhythm of miniature fiddles played by tiny cricket-legged sprites. The grigs leap, somersault, and dance themselves into dizzy circles as they play. Such jolly capering is the most tranquil behavior of which they are capable.

Other sprites, such as pixies and nixies, share the childlike exuberance that grigs display, but none of them can compare to grigs for sheer frenetic activity. The tiny musicians play all through the Faerie night—both to entertain those who enjoy their music, and to awaken, bother, and bedevil those who don't. If grigs sleep at all, the rest is short-lived. One might droop its heads, heavy with feywine, and nod off for a few seconds—only to leap into action the next moment. Grigs live in perpetual motion, their cricket legs propelling them from one merry misadventure to the next.

Tireless Pranksters: Though many fey revel in tricks and games, grigs practice their sport relentlessly. For them, mischief is existence. They collapse tents and pilfer trinkets; they glue swords into their scabbards or draw rude illustrations in the margins of wizards' spellbooks; they rearrange the furniture in houses and affix the chairs to the walls or ceiling. They might coat someone's possessions in sticky pine sap or poke tiny holes in flagons so that the brew dribbles out. Just before yawning mortals drift off to sleep, grigs rub their wings together to emit shrill chirps, startling the weary folk from slumber.

Favorite subjects for grigs' trickery are the big folk, especially visitors from the natural world who stumble into Faerie. Grigs especially enjoy hiding near their targets to observe the effect of their pranks. The proper way to deal with a grig is through patience, for it quickly grows bored with an unresponsive target and moves on to find better sport. Pushing back against a grig's jests only increases the tiny fey's merriment and encourages its tricks all the more.

Such pranks are never intentionally malicious, though, and when a person takes offense at being the subject of its amusement, a grig usually makes amends in the form of a small gift—usually rare Faerie honey or a thoughtful token unique to the Feywild (see "Feywild Gear," *Heroes of the Feywild*™, page 133).

Consummate Fiddlers: Grigs are the finest fiddlers in Faerie and, they claim, everywhere else as well. They have a natural aptitude for music, and their inventive minds compose their tunes rapidly and spontaneously. Some say that grigs take to the fiddle because the construction of the instrument mirrors their own. Like male crickets, every grig's forewing has a ridged vein that acts as a bow when rubbed against the hardened underside—the "strings"—of its top wing. Grigs can chirp a variety of notes in different pitches, creating their own counterpoint to their fiddling.

Grigs understand their music in the same way bards intuitively weave magic from threads of story and song. They are virtuoso performers, and their fiddling can compel any creature—from the tiniest beetle to the biggest bulette—to forget itself in dance. Grigs' talents are regularly employed by the high eladrin houses and the archfey of the Court of Stars. Most creatures in the Feywild are grateful for their performance, not only for its pleasing sound, but because a fiddling grig is an occupied grig, focused on making merry through music rather than mischief.

Bard's Tale: The Merry Grig

Once there was a merry grig who lived in a farmer's field. Every creature on the farm loved the merry grig except Tom Farmer himself, who always had a sour look about him as though he gnawed on bitter seed.

One day the merry grig was bounding along when he spied Tom Farmer yanking cabbages from his field. "Here's some sport," the grig said, and he hid himself invisibly beneath a cabbage.

The instant Tom Farmer pulled up this cabbage, the merry grig uttered a bloodcurdling wail, as if the cabbage were a death's-head torn from a restless corpse. Tom Farmer was so startled he dropped the cabbage and ran for his life. And the merry grig rolled in the field and laughed himself silly.

When Tom Farmer at length realized how he had been tricked, he decided to get even. He knew the merry grig always conducted the crickets' evening symphony in the far fields after sunset, so he waited there in the darkness with a sack, ready to snatch the grig up and teach him a lesson.

But the merry grig spied Tom Farmer crouching in the fields. Guessing his plan, the grig came up with a plan of his own. He went to the farm and opened the livestock pens, inviting the animals to come and dance while he played his lively fiddle. Out came the cows and the sheep and the pigs and the geese and the goats and the hens, and they all began to dance. The merry grig danced them around the farm and into Tom Farmer's house. He danced them onto the roof, and there he left them to converse.

The next morning when Tom Farmer returned empty-handed from the fields, he discovered all his animals standing on the rooftop of his house, and he hadn't the foggiest idea how to get them all down.

Fierce Fighters: Grigs have no desire to engage in violence and avoid conflicts whenever they can, even if doing so means apologizing for a prank. Regardless, the Feywild is a dangerous realm, and grigs have learned to defend themselves against bigger creatures that hold grudges. They equip themselves with tiny dagger-like swords, which they wield with exceptional accuracy. Grigs are as quick at war as they are at play, leaping from one place to another, stabbing with the rapid pace of a fiddle's bow. The same perpetual energy that drives their mischief and their music turns carefree grigs into vicious enemies of any fool that forces them to fight.

Grig	**Level 1 Skirmisher**
Tiny fey humanoid	XP 100
HP 26; **Bloodied** 13	**Initiative** +6
AC 15, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 13	**Perception** +5
Speed 5	Low-light vision
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ **Dagger** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d4 + 4 damage.	
⸸ **Leaping Attack** ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The grig shifts up to half its speed, gaining a +5 bonus to all defenses, and uses *dagger* once at any point during this movement.	
✧ **Fiddler's Dance** (charm) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in the burst); +4 vs. Will	
Hit: The target must move half its speed as a free action and is dazed until the end of the grig's next turn.	
Sustain Standard: The target must move half its speed as a free action and is dazed until the end of the grig's next turn.	
Fade Out (illusion) ✦ **Encounter**	
The grig becomes invisible until it hits or misses with an attack or until the end of its next turn.	
Skills Acrobatics +9, Stealth +9, Thievery +9	
Str 6 (-2) **Dex** 18 (+4) **Wis** 10 (+0)	
Con 10 (+0) **Int** 12 (+1) **Cha** 15 (+2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven	
Equipment dagger, fiddle	

Pixies: Children at Heart

The wee fey's love for nature is exceeded only by a childlike penchant for mischief and fun.

The tiny pixies flit through the golden fields and dark forests of the Feywild on fairy wings, trailing streams of glittering magic like golden embers in their wake. Wild and beautiful, they dance beneath the sun and starlight and sing in the summer rain, as free and fierce as urchin children. They are the epitome of the flying, magical "fairies" that mortals describe in songs, dreams, and stories.

Curious as cats and bold as badgers, pixies are eternally fascinated with the world around them, but seldom daunted by it. They thrive on freedom and search for the fun in every person, place, and object they encounter. Even with all their wild enthusiasm, though, the tiny sprites can be as solemn, graceful, and majestic as any of the mighty archfey they serve.

Born of Magic: Much as elemental creatures are composed of earth, air, fire, and water, pixies are made of magic and summer; of merry laughter, childlike whimsy, and steadfast care—gifts given to their race by the archfey in the dawn of the world. They can vanish into thin air or fly like hummingbirds above the ground. The glittering dust that pixies trail behind them, dissipating like the drifting sparks of a bonfire, is the essence of magic whose properties are so mutable that they have never been defined. In stories, pixie dust is said to make creatures fly, lull them to sleep, enchant their eyes with illusions, or blind them with a flash of light.

Preservers of Nature: Since the beginning of time pixies have served the Court of Stars in the Feywild, performing various duties designed to distract them from mischief: They brush the flower petals with morning dew, awaken the winking stars in the night sky, or paint the sunset in vivid hues. They know the languages of all beasts, and the natural domains where pixies dwell abound with plant and animal life.

Pixies are seldom seen near civilization. In their minds, a town is a dreary place where most big folk stumble through lives of endless drudgery, obeying boring rules and laws made up by other big folk that take themselves too seriously. Pixies prefer places that are wild and free, reflecting their own souls: shaded glens where spotted toadstools grow, forest floors carpeted with moss as green as the world's first dream, streams that whisper songs over smooth rocks.

Playful Sprites: Pixies love games and sport of all kinds. They are carefree creatures of the moment, happy to play established games or invent new ones on the fly. Other creatures often are unwittingly conscripted into pixie entertainments, from rhymes to puzzles to rough brawling. Yet the playful sprites can be dangerously heedless of the fragility of mortal playmates.

Like children and cats, pixies are possessive of their friends. They can be jealous and wary of newcomers who threaten to supplant them in a friend's esteem. Such folk become the victims of pranks and mischief until the sprites are comfortable with them—a pixie might turn invisible and tap on someone's shoulder, tweak her ear, or pinch his backside, driving the perceived rival to distraction.

Pixies love all children, with whom they feel a special kinship. Mortals who gaze upon pixies often recall the distant dreams of their own childhoods, when play was the only object of their lives and death but a distant stranger. On rare occasions a pixie visits a mortal child, watching over it or granting it a fey magic gift (*Heroes of the Feywild*, page 140). Parents must be wary, however, for pixies have been known to abscond with children that they favor, stealing them away to Faerie to be raised by feykind.

Wild Frolics: The most isolated areas of the world and the Feywild are home to frolics of wild pixies.

Where pixies of the Court of Stars dress in gossamer and shimmering silk, their wild kin garb themselves in animal fur, fish scales, frog leather, birds' bones, the leaves and bark of trees, acorns, and other forest-found objects. Though wild pixies have no particular prejudice toward non-fey, they do not consider such beings as equals. A band of wild pixies might toy with a boorish mortal that stumbles upon them until they inadvertently injure (or, in rare cases, slay) their plaything. They might grant the gift of flight only to snatch it away when the person is high in the air, curious to see if the mortal can fly on its own like a fledgling bird falling from its nest.

Pixie Ambusher	**Level 2 Lurker**
Tiny fey humanoid	XP 125
HP 29; **Bloodied** 14	**Initiative** +9
AC 16, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14	**Perception** +6
Speed 4, fly 6 (altitude limit 1)	Low-light vision
STANDARD ACTIONS	
⊕ **Rapier** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, or 2d8 + 10 damage if the target could not see the pixie when it attacked.	
Obscuring Dust ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: Ranged 5 (one creature); the pixie can attempt a Stealth check to become hidden from the target.	
Fade Out (illusion) ✦ **Encounter**	
The pixie becomes invisible until it hits or misses with an attack or until the end of its next turn.	
Skills Nature +6, Stealth +10	
Str 6 (-1) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 10 (+1)	
Con 11 (+1) **Int** 12 (+2) **Cha** 14 (+3)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven	
Equipment leather armor, rapier	

BARD'S TALE: THE PIXIE AND THE SCHOLAR

Once there was a scholar who met a pixie in the wood. "Pixie," said the scholar, "How do you float upon the air? Is the secret in your bones or wings? Is it a quality of your dust or all these things in one?"

The pixie tried to explain: "My voice is full of song, and song floats on the air. My song is in me. So I float on the air."

All the pixie's answers were such rhymes and fantastical nonsense that the scholar could discern little of fact, so he plucked the pixie from the wood and brought it to his study in search of the truth.

The scholar collected the pixie's dust in phials and its spit in tiny urns. He removed its wings, drew its blood, and scraped the marrow from its bones until, wingless and in anguish, the pixie finally died. So the scholar sewed its brittle husk back together and placed it in a glass case upon his wall. He wrote many books about his findings, but in truth the scholar knew little more of pixie flight than he had when he began.

One day, the scholar was walking in the wood when he encountered a frolic of wild pixies who had grown bored. Seeking to impress them with his expertise, the scholar hailed the wee fey and sat down to speak with them. The wild pixies were impressed with the scholar's many grand hypotheses, postulations, and theories. They asked where all his ideas came from.

The scholar tried to explain. "Logic," he said. "Research. Inspiration. And I daresay a bit of natural genius." He winked at the pixies and tapped his brow. The wild pixies, no longer bored, wanted to see the marvelous place where the scholar's ideas were made. So they split his head open with a sharp rock and peered inside.

But alas, all they discovered there was a lump of soft gray stuff no bigger than a river stone.

Sylphs: Dancers in the Clouds

Beautiful nymphs of the air, sylphs change shape like the clouds to trick or inspire those who look upon them.

In the skies over the land of Faerie, the clouds rapidly shift shapes, transforming from castles into dragons into maidens fair. Visitors to the Feywild wonder at these transformations, seldom realizing that they are witnessing beautiful air nymphs at play.

Sylphs glide through the quiet forests of Faerie on dragonfly wings, borne on a whisper of wind. Shifting garments woven from strands of mist shroud their supple forms, and trees bend their green crowns or wave their leaves like pennants in deference to the passing wind maidens. When they leave the forests, sylphs skirt the edges of the sky where it meets the world. In the winds they live without worry, far above the wars and terrors that plague the earthly realm.

Daughters of the Wind: In the beginning of the world, the brothers of the wind frolicked with the four seasons, and from their union the nymphs emerged. But the youngest of the brothers, Susurrus, did not follow his kin to the world, for he was timid and shy, and wary of the primordials' tumultuous creation. While his brothers ranged free, quiet Susurrus lingered between the heavens and the earth. There, in the dawning light of the world, he met a gentle daughter of the sky called Mist, who took him by the hand and led him to tranquil places where his voice

could be heard. There, Susurrus whispered his love for the sky's fair daughter. They wed beneath a quiet waterfall, and their children were the airy sylphs.

Nymphs of Air and Cloud: Sylphs are cousins to nymphs. Unlike those daughters of the seasons, sylphs are descended from the sky and wind, and thus they have strong ties to elemental air. Some call the Elemental Chaos home and are thus elemental creatures, while those who remain in Faerie manifest the magical characteristics of the true fey.

Sylphs are partly made of insubstantial air and shifting cloud, allowing them to transform themselves on a whim. Those that master air and wind magic can shift into cloud form and spread across the sky, or condense to become as tiny as possible.

In all their lives, sylphs rarely touch the ground. They stay out of sight and reach, avoiding confrontation whenever possible, although a powerful sylph roused to anger can call on the furious storm winds and lightning that are her birthright.

Playful Wind Maidens: Like other nymphs, sylphs live to play, though as fey of the air, their games shift as swiftly as their whims. In the forests of the Feywild, sylphs dance to the pipes of satyrs or shrink to the size of pixies and attend merry balls in the toadstool rings sacred to the wee fey. On sunny afternoons they traverse the Faerie skies like dancers on an infinite stage, turning pirouettes as they change from swans into songbirds, then back into winged maidens. At night they slip between the stars and fill the constellations with ever-changing shapes.

Above the forest, sylphs sometimes ride cumulonimbus clouds across the sky like chariots, bringing thunderstorms and lightning to the world wherever they travel. During a storm, they might sing lamentations for the sorrows of the world. Shepherds can sometimes just make out their voices keening over the highlands and pastures.

Fortune Makers: Sylphs especially enjoy their own particular diversion, which they call the "Game of Omens." A sylph disguises herself as a cloud formation until she observes an interesting creature on the ground far below. She shifts her cloudy body into some recognizable shape, holding it just long enough for the subject to notice, then releases the form and drifts away to hide and observe what happens next. The sylph listens with delight as the creature relates its experience to others, declaring it to be a portent.

Cunning sylphs first eavesdrop in disguise on mortal conversations and then form their cloud shapes accordingly. In this way they manipulate creatures toward suggestions of the sylphs'

BARD'S TALE: TO HOLD THE WIND

There was a lonely young shepherd who loved to watch the sky. As he lay in the heather, he imagined he saw the shape of a fair maiden dancing among the clouds. "If only she were mine," the shepherd sighed.

One day a storm came, pelting the pasture with hailstones. When the storm had passed, the shepherd discovered a beautiful sylph lying in the field, her dragonfly wings tattered and full of holes. Her name was Levene, and the storm had broken her cloud and cast her down.

In the weeks that followed, as the shepherd nursed the sylph back to health, Levene fell in love with her savior. "Stay with me," the shepherd said, "for I have loved you since first I saw you."

Levene promised to stay on one condition. "I am a daughter of the wind," said she, "and I must always have my freedom." And because he loved her, the shepherd agreed.

The sylph stayed with him, and their love grew as a gentle breeze fans spark to flame. But Levene was a spirit of the air and often traveled to faraway skies, and the shepherd soon became lonely again. Many solitary nights he thought about what he could do to keep his love at home, and at last he decided on a solution. "Marry me," he said to her. And because Levene loved him, the sylph agreed.

On the day they were married, the shepherd slipped a ring of cold iron onto his wife's finger, for he knew that only iron could bind the fey. "Now we shall finally be together," he said.

They remained happy for a time. But on windy days when Levene looked to the sky, her smile vanished like the sun behind a storm cloud. Slowly she began to diminish, and soon she dwindled into a frail wisp of a thing.

"Why do you fade away so?" asked the shepherd. "Are you not happy by my side?"

"Happy, my love, but not free."

"You roamed so far I feared you might never return."

"To love another is to hold the wind," said the sylph, "never knowing which direction it will blow."

Ashamed, the shepherd removed the iron ring from Levene's finger. "You are free to come or go as you choose," he said.

A great gust of wind filled the shepherd's hovel, and the sylph kissed him once upon the lips before the wind bore her out the door and away.

The shepherd ran after her. He reached out to hold her, but the wind swept Levene from his arms. He called out her name, but the wind tore it from his lips. Again and again he called, until her name was only a cry, like the bleating of a lost sheep—until his voice was lost in the tempest that carried the sylph ever farther away from him.

devising—altering the path of a subject's life without the creature realizing it is being controlled.

Sylph Windshaper	**Level 3 Controller**
Medium fey humanoid	XP 150
HP 42; **Bloodied** 21	**Initiative** +4
AC 17, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 16	**Perception** +7
Speed 6, fly 6 (hover)	Low-light vision
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Wind Slam** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +6 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage, and the sylph slides the target up to 2 squares.	
✧ **Wind Blast** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +6 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and the sylph pushes the target up to 2 squares.	
✲ **Thunderstorm** (lightning, thunder) ✦ **Encounter**	
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +6 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d8 + 4 lightning and thunder damage, and the target falls prone.	
Miss: Half damage.	
Minor Actions	
Mist Form (polymorph) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅	
Effect: The sylph takes on mist form, becoming insubstantial until the end of its next turn.	
Change Shape (polymorph) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The sylph alters its physical form to appear as a Tiny, Small, or Medium humanoid until it uses *change shape* again or until it dies, at which point it reverts to normal form. To assume a specific individual's form, the sylph must have seen that individual. Other creatures can make a DC 26 Insight check to discern that the form is a disguise.	
Skills Bluff +10, Nature +7, Stealth +9	
Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+2)	
Con 10 (+1) **Int** 12 (+2) **Cha** 19 (+5)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven	

About the Author

Steve Townshend is a freelance D&D designer whose recent credits include *Monster Vault™: Threats to the Nentir Vale™*, *Madness at Gardmore Abbey™*, and *Heroes of the Feywild™*. The banderhobbs and Oublivae, Demon Queen of Desolation, are two of his favorite creations for D&D.

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Court of Stars:
The Carrion King

By Jeff LaSala

Illustration by Christopher Burdett

Belarin walked on, leading his allies deeper into the cavernous space. To call it a chamber made too many assumptions—it was too dark and too vast to know. This far into the Feydark, a traveler could lose his identity as well as his way, and it disturbed the warlock that the shriekers they passed hadn't made a sound. Eyeless, mouthless, the overgrown mushrooms had only quivered silently. Belarin was sure they'd been watching him somehow.

His fingers closed tightly around his pact blade just as a burst of soft green lights dispelled the gloom ahead of them, spraying from unseen vents and fungal protrusions. It wasn't bright enough to illuminate the whole cavern, but Belarin could see that the floor was covered in a spongy mass of soil and white, weblike filaments. Small black morels and boulder-sized spheroids were scattered about the sides of the cavern. At the edge of the warlock's vision, a colossal pillar of something . . . living rose toward the unseen ceiling. A giant stem?

Belarin had seen enough. This was no ordinary Feydark cavity—if any such place could ever be called "ordinary"—and his experience with the fey had taught him that mere caution wouldn't suffice. Still, if he and his allies had made it this far, perhaps they were expected.

"We seek the counsel of the Carrion King!" Belarin spoke boldly and looked to the monolithic mushroom. "If he exists at all," he added as bait.

Then step forward, boy, a voice answered in his head. It was mild, almost serene.

Belarin led his companions closer, walking carefully across the spongy floor. Thirty feet in, more of the room lit up under increasing luminescence. He strained his eyes, searching the mote-filled gloom for signs of movement. Then all lights faded, and the room was plunged into utter darkness.

"Did you bring me a sample of Zuggtmoy's spores, as asked?" a new voice spoke, this time aloud—and from only a few feet away.

A new brightness appeared: a ball of violet light bobbing in the air like a deep-dwelling will-o'-wisp. Above it, a shape took form beside the warlock's party, seeming to grow up from the spongy ground in seconds. Smaller than the monolith but still massive, it towered ten feet higher than Starg, the minotaur Belarin had recruited for this expedition. The shape was a mushroom with innumerable spots and fluttering gills beneath its great cap.

Belarin swallowed. "Spores?"

"No, no, of course not," the Carrion King crooned apologetically. "That was someone else. Another mortal, a thousand years ago. Never did return. You look just like him."

Secrets and mysteries are currency in the Feywild, and no one hoards them more than the legendary rulers of the Plane of Faerie do. The origins of the archfey vary with each one—and with each telling—but the spirit known as the Carrion King remains the least understood of them all. Even Baba Yaga, the

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sagacious Mother of All Witches, speaks little of what she knows about this midden sovereign. His existence is seldom mentioned in the mortal world, but sages of the planes know him to be the lord of all fungi, terrestrial and fey alike, and that he has a seat at the Court of Stars.

In truth, the Carrion King is the master of the dark-dwelling mushroom folk known as myconids—though not all myconids serve or even know of him—and one of the greatest powers in the Feydark. Although he can be as erratic and dangerous as other lords of the Feywild, the Carrion King is not as intrinsically self-serving as they are. His efforts on behalf of his subjects—myconids and other fungal creatures whom he "adopts"—supersede most desires for personal glory.

With all the above said, though, the Carrion King is also unequivocally mad. His methods are seldom understood, but his intentions are clear: He desires to spread his legions across the Feydark. To achieve this goal, he must first rid the vast underground of all monsters that destroy, enslave, or otherwise halt the spread of his myconids. The Carrion King's hungry legions will take root and flourish upon the decaying remains of his enemies. This desire for mass slaughter is not inherently malevolent, only inexorable.

Manifold Manifestations

Although most people believe that the Carrion King is a natural outgrowth of the Feywild, conflicting tales in fey circles cite more specific origins. He was once a tree lord, stricken by a curse of madness by Lolth before the Dawn War. No, he was once a toadstool given life and sentience by Corellon. No, of course not, he was actually a god of decay slain by the primordials, and his body was planted in the deep soil of the Feywild. No one can validate or refute any of these claims, and the Carrion King says nothing.

Whatever his true origins, the Carrion King is a unique and multifarious being. He occupies not a single body but many. His consciousness is spread throughout the subterranean depths of the Feydark within a single, expansive fungal root system. When he wishes to physically interact with others—whether for battle, parley, or entertainment—he swiftly grows a mushroomlike body for that purpose. Likewise, his personality is fractured into as many minds as he has bodies, which makes treating with him difficult.

Just as mushrooms are the fruiting bodies of natural fungi, the forms that the Carrion King grows are aspects of his true self. They might resemble gigantic, pseudopod-flailing toadstools or morels with one or more eyes and at least two mouths. Each mushroom body houses a fragment of the king's already riotous mind and, though tethered to his entire being, functions with a personality of its own.

Therein lies the true madness of the Carrion King. Though generally benevolent or at least neutral in temperament, he is an inconstant being at best.

Carrion King **Level 20 Solo Controller**
Huge fey magical beast (plant) XP 14,000

HP 388; **Bloodied** 194 **Initiative** +16
AC 34, **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 32 **Perception** +21
Speed 7, burrow 7, climb 7 Tremorsense 20
Resist 20 necrotic, 20 poison
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Fungal Bed
When the Carrion King rolls initiative, an area of living fungus appears in a close burst 5 and remains until the end of the encounter. The area is difficult terrain for enemies. If a creature makes an area or close attack that includes this area, the creature can target the Carrion King.

Unstoppable
If the Carrion King starts his turn unable to take actions, *drop the body* recharges, and the Carrion King can use it as no action. If the Carrion King does so, unless he spends an action point, he can take only a minor action and a standard action that turn.

Standard Actions

Slam (necrotic, poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +25 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 16 necrotic and poison damage, and the Carrion King slides the target up to 4 squares.

Spore (necrotic, poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); 23 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 18 necrotic and poison damage, and the target falls prone.

Whirling Fungus ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The Carrion King makes two basic attacks.

Spore Burst (necrotic, poison) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +23 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d8 + 18 necrotic and poison damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).

Move Actions

Drop the Body (zone) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: Close burst 1; the burst creates a zone of fungal growth that lasts until the end of the Carrion King's next turn. Any creature that enters or starts its turn in the zone is dazed while the zone persists. After the Carrion King creates the zone, he is removed from play, harmful effects on him end, and he reappears in a space in the fungal bed area.

Minor Actions

Terrifying Hallucination ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +23 vs. Will
Hit: The target moves up to its speed toward its nearest ally, then makes an at-will attack against the ally.

Triggered Actions

Spreading Rebirth ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The Carrion King is first bloodied.
Effect (No Action): Drop the body recharges, and the Carrion King uses it. Instead of reappearing in his Huge form, he reappears in three Large bodies. Each body has 100 hit points, lacks the Carrion King's traits and encounter powers, and is considered to be bloodied.

Skills Arcana +20, Insight +21
Str 23 (+16) **Dex** 22 (+16) **Wis** 22 (+16)
Con 26 (+18) **Int** 20 (+15) **Cha** 25 (+17)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven, Primordial, telepathy 20

Depending on which personality he manifests at any given time, he can be friendly, noble, playful, solemn, or ruthless.

It's uncommon, but some of his incarnations can become violent and antithetical to his larger interests, leaving the rest of his bodies to deal with the consequences. Some even ally themselves with his enemies. With few exceptions, each rogue form regards itself as the true Carrion King, further muddying the truth.

The Carrion King in Combat

To the Carrion King, violence is only one of many viable methods of getting things done. Removal of his enemies by force, however, seems necessary much of the time, and he doesn't shy away from it—especially since he can always grow more bodies. The archfey, as a whole, cannot easily be slain. For the king's spirit to be crippled, several mushroom bodies would have to be located and destroyed in short order.

The statistics block presented here represents one of the Carrion King's physical manifestations—likely one of his rogue forms, which are far more prone to violence than the others. Over the ages, wilder variations (both in power and in shape) have been known to manifest. Whatever form he takes, the Carrion King prefers to lure his enemies to a place of his choosing, usually a damp cavern where gas spores are nestled among the soil or the fungal bed from which his body sprouts.

Depending on the nature of the body's court, fey guards might accompany the king. Plant creatures are most common, and gas spores can always be found with the Carrion King.

Machinations and Myconids

The Carrion King will not rest until his myconid legions thrive uncontested in the Feydark, but many obstacles stand in his way. Chief among them are the wicked fomorians, their servitor cyclopses, and malicious spriggans. Alone, the myconids are unlikely to succeed against any of these foes. The mushroom folk are relentless, but they are not powerful or intelligent enough to overcome the might of their enemies.

Regardless, the Carrion King works to increase the myconid race and its offshoots. Wherever filaments of his being touch the roots of myconid colonies, his benevolence and wisdom direct the sovereigns and rotpriests toward the acquisition of food and resources. Colonies not connected to the Carrion King's physical or spiritual root system are far more vulnerable to outside influence. It is these myconids, especially those dwelling in the Underdark or the Shadowdark, that are typically subjugated by more powerful creatures.

The Carrion King rarely cares about the death of individual myconids. As rotpriests and gas spores demonstrate with their *roots of the colony* and *spore burst* abilities, the mushroom folk believe in self-sacrifice and community loyalty and take those virtues seriously. In the safety of a fungal forest or subterranean lair, a myconid's death is a precursor to new life. It does not die in vain but feeds the colony that it inhabits.

Although the Carrion King means well, he often extends this "needs of the many" philosophy to non-fungus allies and friends as well.

Symbiotic Servants

Through care and experimentation, the Carrion King has cultivated new species of myconids. One such creature is the myconid symbiont. These rare myconids survive and flourish by attaching themselves to a plant host. Outwardly, the symbiont manifests as a fungal pseudopod that sprouts from the host's central structure like an additional limb. Inwardly, its filaments spread throughout the host's body, strengthening the creature and granting it additional abilities.

Most myconid symbionts bond with humanoid or hulking plant monsters such as wood woads, shambling mounds, or treants. Some join with dryads, creating beautifully exotic specimens.

Together, the symbiont and the host represent a single creature. They act as one, although the symbiont can direct the host's actions when it wishes. Through this union, the symbiont can venture to places that most myconids would shun—such as under the bright overland sun. In turn, the host develops unusual new defenses.

Nearly all myconid symbionts serve the Carrion King and act as his emissaries. Through them, the king can seek non-fungus heroes and monsters, speak to them, or lend them assistance. All such symbionts are considered to be myconids and plants, and they have tremorsense 10, can speak Common, and gain telepathy 5. They also have the following powers.

Triggered Actions

Roots of the Colony ✦ At-Will

Trigger: While a myconid ally is within 5 squares of it, the symbiont is hit by an attack.

Effect (Free Action): The symbiont and the ally each take one-half of the damage from the attack.

Spore Burst (necrotic, poison) **✦ Encounter**

Trigger: The symbiont is first bloodied.

Attack (No Action): Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); level + 3 vs. Fortitude

Hit: Level + 3 necrotic and poison damage.

Miss: Half damage.

Allies and the Court of Stars

Since its inception, the Court of Stars has granted the Carrion King a nominal seat at its conclave. Most archfey of the Court regard him with mixed feelings of respect, pity, and disdain. Some quietly admire him, seeing him as a beneficent force of life in the Feydark, while haughtier members of the Court see the king as little more than a foul patch of fungus best forgotten. Oblivious to or unconcerned with their opinions, the Carrion King rarely attends Court gatherings. When he does, one of his smaller offshoots appears with gifts of rare, delectable truffles, and he listens to the proceedings and complex intrigues of the eladrin and other fey lords, seldom participating in the discussions.

Where most archfey are scornful of mortals or see them as playthings or pawns, the Carrion King is genuinely fond of them. He takes interest in the vigor of their short, productive lives and is not above harnessing and rewarding it accordingly. In fact, the king is initially friendly to all mortal visitors to his realms, regardless of whether they are trespassers, explorers, or assassins. He accepts intruders of all stripes—the more exotic, the better—into his confidence if he believes they can help him.

The Carrion King watches for such visitors through the blindsight "gaze" of nearly every shrieker (*Dungeon* 201) in the Feydark. In this way, he appraises heroes of interest remotely. If he is uncertain of their prowess or intentions, he does not hesitate to flush out dangerous monsters and observe the results. If he is impressed by the heroes, he sends myconids to greet them on the fringes of the domains over which has influence. Although myconid guards and rotpriests cannot communicate verbally, they release harmless spores to express pure emotions to these visitors, such as welcome and a desire for peace. (The Carrion King is surprisingly forgiving to those who slaughter his emissaries at first, although subsequent violence is sure to anger him.) Given the opportunity, myconid emissaries escort cooperative adventurers to the sovereign of their colony, who can invite the Carrion King directly.

If visitors of great renown enter the Feywild, the Carrion King does not bother with appraisals or tests. Instead, he sends a myconid symbiont—usually one bonded with a "pleasant" plant monster, such as a dryad or treant—to enlist them directly.

This behavior has given the Carrion King a reputation for hospitality among adventurers who repeatedly visit the Feywild. At times, the archfey's naïveté has led to the slaughter of whole myconid colonies by cruel or treasure-seeking mercenaries, but the king's optimism is unflagging. He is eager to befriend foreigners and become their benefactor because he needs their help. The strength of his numbers does not suffice against his enemies, but small groups of adventurers might. And if prospective heroes perish in the trying, that, too, is acceptable. The fallen feed his armies.

In addition to recruiting traditional heroes, the Carrion King encourages his subjects to befriend xorns, enticing the creatures with precious gems and other valuables left behind by adventurers who perish in the Feydark.

Fungi and the Feydark

The Carrion King has been around, in one form or another, for nearly as long as the Feywild. He has largely forgotten his own origins—a fractured personality isn't conducive to a long memory—but he knows he has had many names. The "Carrion King" is only the latest epithet.

Psilofyr the Spore Lord, the entity mentioned on page 109 of *Underdark*, was probably one name given to him by the myconids in ages past, but the Carrion King cannot recall it. Amasutelob, the myconid of considerable power who claims to be the "Last Spore" of Psilofyr, might in fact be one of the Carrion King's manifestations gone rogue. Lacking true malevolence, Amasutelob is merely a bully among myconid sovereigns, so the archfey usually allows him to "govern" from the Great Cathedral and claim whatever he wishes as his kingdom.

The Carrion King does not reside in one form or in a single sanctum. He is almost everywhere in the Feydark, in some places so slight as to be completely unnoticed. Filaments of his being (literally, hyphae of the massive mycelia that he is) thread unnoticed beneath fomorian kingdoms such as Mag Tureah and Inbharann, as well as gnomish domains such as Drochdan. In fungus-dominated regions, like the Living Grotto, the king's presence and voice are much more prevalent.

Carrion King Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful Arcana check.

DC 20: The Carrion King is the epithet given to an archfey of great power who dwells in the Feydark. He looks after fungal creatures (especially myconids), sentient or otherwise, and he is believed to be friendly to visitors to his realm. Fomorians are among his greatest enemies.

DC 30: The Carrion King is included in the Court of Stars, but he seldom participates. Indeed, most of the other archfey regard him with disdain or pity. He does not strive for glory or influence, only the quiet spread of his minions across the Feydark. Although few fear that he will outgrow the subterranean realms, he is unaccountably mad and inconstant.

DC 35: The character knows everything described in this article, as well as a few specific locations in the Feydark where the Carrion King can be found through intermediaries or one of his manifestations.

Enemies of the King

The Carrion King frequently changes his mind about who his enemies are—or, more precisely, he differs between one mind and the next. But on one point he is clear: Any creature who dares to enslave a myconid becomes a foe. As a result, he has many.

Myconid colonies loyal to the Carrion King, if they are numerous enough, actively seek to liberate—or destroy—the colonies tainted and controlled by other races. Fomorians in the Feydark and drow in the Underdark are the slavers most consistently opposed by the Carrion King, but they are not the only ones. Wayward myconids who wander into the Shadowdark are often used by the sinister shadar-kai as shock troops. Such fungus folk are the farthest from the Carrion King's reach, but he hasn't given up on winning them back.

Racial enemies aside, several foes are recurring subjects of the Carrion King's ire.

Lolth

Some myths suggest that the Spider Queen factors into the Carrion King's origin. These stories claim that a curse of insanity intended for Corellon during the Dawn War was instead redirected into the archfey that became the Carrion King—and incited the madness that afflicts him still. Whatever the truth of this tale, drow and myconids have never mixed peaceably in the Underdark. Either they slaughter each other, or the dark elves enslave the mushroom folk as cheap labor or battle fodder. For this reason, the Carrion King allies with anyone willing to battle Lolth and her chaotic, dark-skinned children.

Zuggtmoy

The Demon Queen of Fungi embodies only the virulence and death that fungus represents. But where Zuggtmoy desires chaos and destruction for its own sake, the Carrion King uses death and decay to renew life. As an immortal spirit of the Feywild, he is the antithesis of what the demon queen purveys. Wherever her foul cultists encounter fey or fungi sympathetic to the Carrion King, blades and stipe staffs are sure to cross.

Himself

Not only must the Carrion King struggle against his own disordered mind, but at times his physical forms go rogue—very rogue. These large mushrooms remain connected to his consciousness but refuse to act in concert with the will of the whole. What's more, these renegade forms can be as cruel and dangerous as any Unseelie lord, for they are the king's suppressed fears made manifest. As intelligent as—and often more powerful than—his other incarnations, these mutinous offshoots have been known to enslave myconids, set up kingdoms of their own, bargain with fomorians, and consort with demons. Here are three such renegades that have adopted vainglorious new titles and personas:

The Mirelord: Dwelling in a submerged temple in the mortal world, the Mirelord resembles a massive blue slime mold with innumerable eyes and quivering limbs. Believing himself an extension of Juiblex, the demon lord of slime, this Carrion King renegade commands cultists devoted to the Faceless Lord and surrounds himself with unsavory oozes. He works to germinate new, unwholesome species of myconids and aims to infect the entire race.

The Great Mushrump: This charismatic renegade, who lives closest to home, takes the form of a gigantic red-and-white toadstool. He is the most insidious of the Carrion King's offshoots because he seems friendly to outsiders and almost appears sane. The Great Mushrump whispers false and treasonous rumors in the ear of King Finutar, the gnome monarch of Drochdan. In this way, he inspires paranoia among the Feydark's more peaceful residents.

The Caliph of the Depths: Resembling a disturbingly oversized, rocklike truffle with a tooth-filled maw, this renegade believes that allying with the fomorian kingdoms is the only salvation for the myconid race. He lends his support to their conquests and consorts with Zuggtmoy and other demons.

Whenever one of these fungal tyrants manifests and goes rogue, at least half of the Carrion King's other forms convene to find and reabsorb it. This task is easier said than done because the renegade is aware of their plans.

Using the Carrion King

Given the almost insurmountable goal that the Carrion King has set for himself—ridding the Feydark of all opposition—he always needs help. Due to his fractious nature, he can be an amiable benefactor, a terrible villain, or both. In this way, he can be the source of many challenges, quests, and awards.

Unless the player characters are in the epic tier, the Carrion King will not send them to assail a fomorian fortress directly, but he might ask them to remove specific obstacles, recover lost relics, or shatter the source of his enemies' power.

Below are three adventure or campaign ideas.

Blinding the Eyes (Heroic or Paragon): The Carrion King asks the characters to aid him against the fomorians who rule from their foul citadels across the Feydark. As a first blow, he aims to cripple the kingdom of Inbharann. The depravities of the fomorians have reached a new low there; myconid colonies by the dozens have been enslaved and twisted beyond recognition. The Carrion King asks the adventurers to pilfer one of the *eyes unblinking* (*Underdark*™, page 103) that the fomorians use to guard their fortresses. If the party can bring one to him undamaged, he believes he can enact a ritual that will blind all the fomorians. If successful, the archfey can lay siege to Inbharann long enough to put their myconid slaves out of their misery, and he can also weaken the fomorians' defenses at large.

Dread Fungus (Paragon): The Carrion King has set his sights on the Isle of Dread (*Manual of the Planes*, page 43), invading many of the ruins that pockmark the savage jungle and filling them with myconid spores. Soon he might seek to enslave the primitive races who dwell on the island. His true goal: during the next worldfall, to capture choice mortals who are part of an ancient prophecy.

The Carrion King is up to something terrible, a bid for power that only Baba Yaga knows about. This isn't the work of the real Carrion King—merely a scheme of one of his renegade manifestations. Unsure of the rogue's intentions, the other personalities of the Carrion King need heroes to travel to the Isle of Dread and investigate.

Germination Abroad (Paragon or Epic): Eradicating the Feydark of all evil or unsavory monsters might seem beneficial—and the other archfey would be glad to see the fomorians vanquished—but the Carrion King shouldn't go unchecked, either. Most of his offshoots agree that he does not intend to remove the Feydark's more peaceful residents, such as the gnomes. But given the opportunity, the Carrion King might spread his spores far beyond the Feywild.

In this scenario, the mad archfey has been succeeding against the fomorians, cyclopses, and spriggans, and he has decided to propagate the mushroom folk in the dark, moist places of the mortal world as well. Myconid colonies begin to sprout with alarming numbers and speed. The only way to contain this new threat is to seek out the source—the Carrion King, wherever his minds are the most active. This quest requires both diplomacy and strength of arms because not all of the archfey's minds will listen to reason.

Friendly Mushrooms

If player characters earn the favor of the Carrion King, he is eager to keep them happy. He gives them treasure for which he has little need; gold and gems harvested from slain invaders can benefit myconids only when given as gifts to outsiders. But the archfey also has unique boons to offer, depending on what the characters do for him.

One such treasure is the *pileus helm*, a special helmet made from the hardened heads of dead myconid sovereigns and repurposed with magic. These helms are comical to look upon when worn (though the Carrion King thinks they are quite becoming). A *pileus helm* confers limited telepathy and resistances to the wearer.

In addition, if the characters are actively adventuring on the king's behalf, he might send a myconid symbiont ally to accompany them. It can offer guidance, knowledge, or assistance in battle. In the heroic tier, the symbiont could be bonded with a dryad or wood woad; in the paragon tier, a shambling mound or treant would serve nicely. In the Feywild, the Carrion King can see through the eyes of the symbiont-bonded creature and can speak through it to offer his insight or opinions on the party's doings.

Pileus Helm — Level 6 Uncommon

This helmet is made of a tough, fibrous material shaped like a mushroom cap, and it smells of soil.

Lvl 6 1,800 gp — Lvl 26 1,125,000 gp
Lvl 16 45,000 gp

Head Slot

Properties

- ✦ You gain telepathy 5. You can use the telepathy to speak with any eligible creatures in range, broadcasting your message to multiple recipients.
- ✦ You gain resist 5 necrotic and resist 5 poison, and a +2 item bonus to saving throws against necrotic or poison effects.

Level 16: Resist 10, and a +4 item bonus.
Level 26: Resist 15, and a +6 item bonus.

About the Author

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Court of Stars: Thrumbolg, First Lord of Mag Tureah

By Jeff Dougan and Tim Eagon

Illustration by Jason A. Engle

Thrumbolg is a name feared throughout the Feywild. As the mightiest fomorian lord in the Feydark, he is renowned for his cruelty and fanaticism. Those unfortunate enough to become slaves within his realm, the ancient fortress-city of Mag Tureah, suffer a short, miserable existence. If they have aptitude or training in the arcane arts, Thrumbolg puts them to work deciphering the inner workings of the many unstable portals that riddle his domain. Slaves without such talents are forced through those same portals in the service of his sadistic goals for domination. Thrumbolg believes that Mag Tureah's fickle portals, which seemingly reach every corner of the mortal realm, are the key to his eventual subjugation of all worlds.

The Conquest of Mag Tureah

Before Thrumbolg conquered Mag Tureah, countless fomorian armies had been broken by the horrors that lurked within its iron walls. The fortress quickly fell to Thrumbolg's forces, however, after he led a daring raid into the dark iron spire at Mag Tureah's heart and seemingly put its guardians to flight. The nature of Mag Tureah's original inhabitants remains a mystery, since only the First Lord has ever faced them and survived. As for the meeting—and the question of whether Thrumbolg truly defeated or only bargained with Mag Tureah's masters—well, that remains the subject of intense speculation.

With the fortress secured, the only thing that has prevented Thrumbolg from amassing an army and marching forth against the mortal world is his incomplete understanding of the innumerable portals within Mag Tureah. The First Lord can occasionally predict the behavior and destination of specific portals using complex calculations, but the key to making them obey his commands remains out of reach. In the meantime, the weighty almanacs containing his accumulated knowledge remain under heavy guard at the center of his demesne.

Baba Yaga's Prophecy

One day, Baba Yaga came before the First Lord. Her dancing hut was already infamous, but she sought to expand its workings by incorporating the magic that fueled Mag Tureah's portals. By now, the First Lord's personal power was so great that not even the Mother

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of All Witches dared to take what she desired without paying a price. What Thrumbolg demanded of her was to know his future—so Baba Yaga told him. "It is written in the stars that you shall be destroyed by your own son."

At that time, Thrumbolg had three sons—Goibniu the smith, Bres the fair, and stony Tethra. Thrumbolg reasoned that if he killed his sons, he would become effectively immortal, giving him all the time he needed to fulfill his nefarious plans. Tethra was present in Mag Tureah at the time, and his father's deadly gaze struck him down without warning. Bres was commanding an army besieging the eladrin city of Astrazalian, so Thrumbolg deliberately allowed a copy of his son's battle plans to fall into the hands of Oran, the Green Lord. The siege was broken, and Bres was slain by Oran's own hand. When the news of his brothers' deaths reached Goibniu, he knew he would be next—and that his only hope of survival lay in killing his father first.

An Immortal Tyrant

Goibniu sought out and demanded the help of a powerful cabal of cyclops artisans known as the Seared Ones.[1] Using fell magic, they forged their masterwork—an emerald-encrusted broadsword imbued with Goibniu's anger, his thirst for vengeance, and his perverse sense of justice. When the young fomorian grasped its elaborately decorated hilt, he named the sword *Fragarach*, which means "The Answerer" or "The Retaliator" in the fomorians' dialect of Elven.

Fragarach was a potent weapon, effectively making Goibniu the equal of his father in power. The young fomorian used the sword's magic to bypass Mag Tureah's defenses and rashly led a small army of cyclopses into his father's demesne. When Goibniu confronted Thrumbolg, their battle was long and terrible. For every blow Thrumbolg struck and for every bit of potent magic he unleashed, *Fragarach* delivered a vicious and equalizing counterattack. Goibniu was on the verge of victory when a fomorian assassin emerged from Thrumbolg's inner sanctum and struck him dead. Following Goibniu's death, Mag Tureah's defenders quickly routed his army—even as one cyclops loyal to Goibniu grabbed *Fragarach* and fled through a portal moments before it closed.

This turn of events had an unintended consequence. By providing a vessel for Goibniu's hatred of Thrumbolg, the Seared Ones had unwittingly created an agent of Baba Yaga's prophecy. *Fragarach* is now the only thing that can fulfill her prediction, and as long as it remains lost, the First Lord maintains his immortality. Knowing this, Thrumbolg has worked to expand his reach in the Feydark and the Feywild, while his agents scour the planes for the sword. Their search continues to this day.

Appearance and Personality

Thrumbolg stands nearly twenty feet tall, his body and asymmetrical face covered in lumps of gristle. His nose is so squashed that it lies nearly flat, his upper lip extending down to the top of his chin. Two iron rings pierce the brow over his crimson "evil eye" and pin back his otherwise droopy eyelid. When the First Lord focuses his malevolent, unblinking gaze on an enemy, his horizontal cat's-eye pupil dilates to cover nearly the entire orb. A cunning and unspeakably evil intellect underlies the cold gaze of his other normal eye.

Thrumbolg revels in the apparent immortality that Baba Yaga's prophecy has granted him, and thus he eschews all but the lightest of armors. On the rare occasions when he feels compelled to dress the part of a head of state, Thrumbolg's regalia consists of an electrum torc and an iron coronet, the latter forged of metal taken from one of the upper parapets of Mag Tureah's central citadel.

Millennia in proximity to the magical energy seeping out of Mag Tureah's portals have empowered Thrumbolg's two great weapons. The leaf-bladed spear *Areadbhar* ("The Slaughterer") is almost as tall as the fomorian king. It possesses a rudimentary intelligence that enables him to wield it in one hand, and its attacks can scatter even the deadliest foes across the battlefield. If Thrumbolg is ever incapacitated, *Areadbhar* animates and attacks for him. The barbed javelin *Gae Bulg* ("Death Spear") is smaller but no less deadly. Its razor-sharp tines inflict grievous, bleeding wounds whose agony can leave foes at the First Lord's mercy. Whether *Gae Bulg* hits or misses its target, it returns to Thrumbolg's hand in the blink of an eye.

Thrumbolg is cruel, clever, and much more lucid than other fomorians. He typically pays little heed to those lacking the power to threaten his rule, but he warily watches those he deems worthy of his attention. This includes other fomorian lords, the Court of Stars and their most powerful agents, and any creature rumored to possess *Fragarach*.

Thrumbolg readily makes bargains with other creatures, but only if he can give little while gaining much. Considering himself immortal, the First Lord thinks in an extremely long-term manner, so any advantage he gains might not become known for decades. On one occasion, he loaned a paltry sum of gold to a drow matriarch—an act that ultimately led to the downfall of a fomorian kingdom encroaching on Mag Tureah's borders a century later.

Thrumbolg is diplomatic and manipulative. The goblin kingdoms of the Feywild, including Nachtur, continue to ally with him. They contribute conscript troops to Mag Tureah's armies, even though Thrumbolg and his generals treat the goblins as little more than disposable melee fodder.

Thrumbolg, First Lord of Mag Tureah **Level 25 Elite Controller**
Huge fey humanoid (giant), fomorian XP 14,000

HP 466; **Bloodied** 233 **Initiative** +18
AC 39, **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 37, **Will** 38 **Perception** +22
Speed 8 All-around vision, darkvision
Immune blinded, dominated, sleep
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

All-Around Vision
Enemies can't gain combat advantage by flanking Thrumbolg.

Areadbhar's Wrath
If Thrumbolg starts his turn conscious but unable to take actions, *Areadbhar* attacks on its own, using Thrumbolg's *Areadbhar* attack as no action.

Cheating Fate
When Thrumbolg drops to 0 hit points, his body and possessions disappear, but he is not destroyed. He reappears in Mag Tureah at full hit points and with his possessions after the next sunrise or sunset. If an attack made with *Fragarach* drops him to 0 hit points, Thrumbolg does not rise again.

Truesight
Thrumbolg can see invisible creatures and objects.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Areadbhar** (teleportation, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +30 vs. AC
Hit: 5d8 + 11 damage, and Thrumbolg teleports the target up to 5 squares.

Gae Bulg (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 50 (one creature); +30 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 10 damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 damage and is immobilized (save ends both).
First Failed Saving Throw: Ongoing 15 damage and the target is restrained (save ends both).
Effect: Gae Bulg returns to Thrumbolg's hand after each attack.

First Lord's Dread Gaze (poison, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one bloodied creature); +28 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target takes poison and psychic damage equal to its bloodied value.
Miss: The target takes poison and psychic damage equal to its healing surge value.

Move Actions

Master of Portals (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: Thrumbolg teleports up to 10 squares.

Minor Actions

Evil Eye ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: Thrumbolg uses one of the following evil eyes. This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks. While bloodied, Thrumbolg can use two different evil eyes, each against a different target.
1. *Eye of Command* (charm): Ranged 10; +28 vs. Will; the target is dominated until the end of Thrumbolg's next turn.
2. *Eye of Death* (necrotic): Ranged 10; +28 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 9 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened until the end of Thrumbolg's next turn.
3. *Eye of Obeisance* (psychic): Ranged 10; +28 vs. Will; 2d6 + 9 psychic damage, and the target falls prone and cannot stand up until the end of Thrumbolg's next turn.
4. *Eye of Pain:* Ranged 10; +28 vs. Fortitude; the target gains vulnerable 10 to all damage until the end of Thrumbolg's next turn.
5. *Eye of Retribution* (force, psychic): Ranged 10; +28 vs. Will; until the end of Thrumbolg's next turn, whenever the target damages Thrumbolg, the target takes 15 force and psychic damage.
6. *Eye of Terror* (fear, psychic): Ranged 10; +28 vs. Will; 3d6 + 9 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of Thrumbolg's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Hungry Spears (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy is bloodied by one of Thrumbolg's attacks.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): Thrumbolg makes a basic attack against the triggering enemy.

Imperious Gaze ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Trigger: Thrumbolg is conscious and an enemy starts its turn within 5 squares of him.
Effect (No Action): Thrumbolg uses one random *evil eye* against the triggering enemy.

Skills Arcana +24, Athletics +25, Bluff +26, Diplomacy +26, Dungeoneering +22
Str 27 (+20) **Dex** 22 (+18) **Wis** 20 (+17)
Con 25 (+19) **Int** 25 (+19) **Cha** 28 (+21)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment *Areadbhar* (spear), *Gae Bulg* (javelin)

A Tour of Mag Tureah

When most people think of Mag Tureah, they picture its central citadel.[2] In addition to the citadel, Thrumbolg's domain consists of several huge, interconnected vaults filled with lush fungal forests and opening up to hundreds of miles of twisting tunnels. These passageways either end abruptly or lead to portals linked to the mortal world. An arching cluster of glowing crystals or a circular tangle of roots sometimes indicates the presence of a relatively stable portal. Most portals remain unmarked, though, and wink in and out of existence, shift locations, or change destinations seemingly at random.

Luminescent crystals that mimic the stars of the world above dot the onyx ceilings of Mag Tureah's eight central vaults. Those crystalline constellations have fooled innumerable travelers into crossing through one of Mag Tureah's portals, believing they were still in the mortal realm. Massive floor-to-ceiling spires of black iron covered with pulsating alien sigils dominate each of these huge caverns. Remarkably, given their great age and the Feydark's pervasive moisture, not a hint of rust mars their surfaces. Thrumbolg's finest cyclops and spriggan soldiers garrison these spires and safeguard the vaults and their portals. In addition to these fortifications, Mag Tureah's architects have incorporated the realm's natural features into its defenses, including its confusing labyrinth of narrow tunnels and the seemingly bottomless Dark River that cuts a raging course through the fortress.

The one weakness in Mag Tureah's defenses is the point at which the King's Highway bisects one of the fortress's outermost caverns.[3] To the First Lord's dismay, no structure he has attempted to build in this cavern has risen more than four courses of stone before collapsing, no matter what magic he and his most skilled arcanists and ritualists have employed.

THRUMBOLG LORE

The following knowledge checks reveal useful information about Thrumbolg, Mag Tureah, and *Fragarach*:

Arcana or History DC 20: Information in the introductory paragraph (prior to "The Conquest of Mag Tureah").

Arcana or History DC 25: Information in "The Conquest of Mag Tureah."

Arcana or History DC 30: Information in "Baba Yaga's Prophecy" and "An Immortal Tyrant."

Arcana or History DC 35: Information in "A Tour of Mag Tureah," "Mag Tureah's Denizens," "A Visit to the First Lord's Court," and "Fragarach."

Arcana or Dungeoneering DC 35: Information in "The Portal Network."

Keeping this area secure is the personal responsibility of Morc, Thrumbolg's chief general. His personal legion bivouacs nearby.

A colossal iron citadel sprawls within Mag Tureah's largest and deepest vault, and it is home to Thrumbolg, his sycophantic court, and the bulk of his armies. At its center stands an immense tower that almost scrapes the vault's ceiling a mile above. This tower is the First Lord's personal demesne, and he permits entry to no one else. Many believe that Thrumbolg communes inside the spire with whatever dark powers originally created Mag Tureah. Even those fomorians that plot to usurp the First Lord's power and dream of seizing the spire are fearful of what might lurk within.

Mag Tureah's Denizens

Mag Tureah is home to tens of thousands of creatures, most slaves. Representatives of every race live in the fortress's squalid slave pens under the vigilant eye and cruel lash of cyclops taskmasters. Many of Mag Tureah's slaves are obtained in raids against nearby settlements. Others come from the notorious flesh markets of the dismal fomorian city of Harrowhame.

Any slaves with magical training are forced to study Mag Tureah's portals, while others perform backbreaking manual labor until they drop from exhaustion. Such work includes excavating tunnels in search of new portals or tending to the fungal crops that feed Thrumbolg's ravenous armies.

Creatures unable or unwilling to work are taken by the cyclopses and forced to go through any newly discovered portals. Creatures that return while a portal remains open are expected to report on what lies beyond. The instability of the portals means that many close as soon as a creature passes through them, leaving unprepared slaves to die in isolated ruins or dangerous locations in the mortal realm.

All kinds of evil fey, as well as a large contingent of mortal creatures, serve in Thrumbolg's armies. Enslaved goblins and bloodthirsty spriggans swell the ranks as foot soldiers under the brutal command of cyclops officers. Banshraes, boggles, hengeyokai, lamias, and quicklings act as assassins, saboteurs, and spies. In addition, nearly two hundred fomorians live in Mag Tureah. The First Lord has commanded that they do nothing but help him study the fortress's portals, and as a result, many have become accomplished arcanists and ritual casters.

Thrumbolg's servants also operate a captive breeding program for wretch dragons.[4] These misshapen beasts serve as living siege weapons and as reluctant mounts for important fomorians. The First Lord's personal steed is an ancient wyrm named Scathach.

In addition to the Feydark's monstrous denizens, many creatures accidentally wander into the First Lord's domain through unseen portals in the mortal world. Thrumbolg's soldiers capture or kill most of them, but a few escape into Mag Tureah's uncharted passageways. The tunnels that provide refuge for these creatures also offer a measure of freedom for Mag Tureah's slave population. From time to time, small groups of slaves flee into the deeper tunnels, banding together to form feral tribes. Most last less than a generation and are eventually recaptured or killed by Thrumbolg's soldiers, or they succumb to the predations of monsters or each other.

Despite ongoing efforts to eradicate them, roving mobs of gremlins plague Mag Tureah. These mischievous creatures, the product of Thrumbolg's failed experiments on enslaved goblins,[5] wisely give the main tunnels and vaults a wide berth. They love to wreak havoc on isolated work sites and make life even more miserable for the fortress's slaves.

A Visit to the First Lord's Court

Creatures that have items or information related to Thrumbolg's goals—gaining mastery of Mag Tureah's portals, locating and destroying *Fragarach,* and conquering the known planes—are welcome in the First Lord's court. If obtaining what he wants through violence seems risky, Thrumbolg might grant characters safe passage through his realm (though he offers no guarantees of how long that safety will last). In addition, his court regularly receives ambassadors, mercenaries seeking employment, and even slaves given special status and commendation for discovering hitherto unknown portals.

Thrumbolg houses visitors in lavishly appointed apartments deep within a heavily guarded compound in Mag Tureah's central citadel. A small army of slaves caters to these guests' every whim, no matter

THRUMBOLG'S COURTIERS

Some of the most notable members of the First Lord's court are described below.

Aithne: Aithne was once Thrumbolg's chief consort and mother to Goibniu. Now, she wanders through Mag Tureah alone while carrying on a one-sided conversation with her dead son. The elderly fomorian witch seeks to avenge him, and she allies herself with anyone who can gain Goibniu's ghostly approval.

Ealadha: The most powerful warlock in Mag Tureah, Ealadha is an expert ritual caster and Thrumbolg's chief advisor on arcane matters. He is also a notorious hypochondriac, and he allows no one to touch or approach him. He speaks to others through *sending stones* of his own design, and a retinue of *unseen servants* attends to his every need.

Morc: Thrumbolg's most able general, Morc commands Mag Tureah's outer defenses. Two rival personalities inhabit his hulking form and seemingly emerge at random—one an erudite strategist; the other, a gibbering berserker.

Saethril: Saethril is a mad eladrin bard who serves as Thrumbolg's herald and court minstrel. While enslaved in Harrowhame, Saethril's captors subjected him to the Baleful Ritual of the Evil Eye and then released him.[6] After his kin rejected him, the disfigured and embittered eladrin returned to the Feydark and offered his services to Thrumbolg. Saethril delights in "rescuing" eladrin from Mag Tureah's slave pens. A few he sets free. The rest are sadistically murdered at his leisure.

how fanciful. In addition, for the duration of their stay, a lamia in the guise of a friendly eladrin or a drow slave acts as a concierge and tutors characters on the finer points of protocol in Thrumbolg's court.

Visitors are confined to these apartments, which are enchanted to thwart teleportation, invisibility, and scrying from within. Thrumbolg hopes to learn every detail of the plans and personalities of visitors to his realm before he meets them, and he sometimes keeps characters waiting for days or weeks before admitting them into his presence. During this time, cyclops guards keep characters under constant surveillance, while the decadent furnishings and decor of the guest suites magically record every word spoken or written within an apartment. Even the surface thoughts of guests can be read for short periods.

When Thrumbolg holds court, he does so in the shadowy plaza surrounding Mag Tureah's central spire. At a half-mile wide, this plaza can comfortably fit thousands beneath Thrumbolg's massive iron throne, which levitates above the proceedings. Colossal iron braziers belching emerald flames bathe the plaza in flickering light and blot out the vault's onyx ceiling with their acrid smoke. The light given off by enslaved sprites chained to the floor provides the assembled courtiers and petitioners with steadier illumination. The dragon Scathach and an honor guard of a dozen elite fomorian warriors are Thrumbolg's security, though he scarcely needs it.

Thrumbolg's court operates under strict protocols. Attendees must kneel before him, with slaves forced to kowtow and constantly avert their eyes. No one can stand, speak, or approach the fomorian king without his permission. Speakers must abide by a strict five-minute time limit. Tradition also dictates that when Thrumbolg is addressed, he must be effusively praised. This flattery does nothing to sway his opinions, but he enjoys it as a sign of his dominance. These sessions last for hours, during which time Thrumbolg engages in diplomacy and listens to reports concerning the progress of his various plots.

If Thrumbolg grants characters an audience, his interaction with them depends on their level. He is unlikely to meet with heroic tier characters unless they appear on behalf of an entity worthy of his attention. Even then, his courtiers make it clear that though characters may address the First Lord directly, his herald Saethril will deliver any response.

Based on their reputations, the First Lord is likely to grant an audience to paragon and epic tier adventurers. Surprisingly, Thrumbolg is quite personable during his initial dealings with others, even when speaking through Saethril. As long as a petitioner abides by his rules, the First Lord remains friendly, empathetic, and attentive throughout their five-minute interaction. This is a facade, of course, designed to lull a speaker into a false sense of security. Thrumbolg is so convincing at this act that many who have survived an audience with him end up questioning the legends of his cruelty and evil.

Negotiating with the First Lord is a difficult task. Thrumbolg drives a hard bargain and has no fear of death (unless confronted with *Fragarach*). He is nearly impossible to intimidate and is willing to resort to violence if necessary. Typically, he listens with mock sincerity to a petitioner before rejecting a request. He then commands the individual to leave his presence, which revokes any guarantee of safety. Depending on his mood, he might feed characters to Scathach, enslave them, or give them up to twenty-four hours to depart Mag Tureah. Many choose to take their chances and flee through the nearest portal.

If a proposal intrigues Thrumbolg, he entertains the offer as long as it doesn't cost him much. A few slaves, some trinkets from his brimming treasure vaults, or access to a particular portal is a small price to pay for an advantageous alliance, information on *Fragarach*'s whereabouts, or powerful magic that might help the First Lord expand his realm.

Thrumbolg is true to his word and does not renege on any deal he makes. Those dealing with him will find that he is merciless if tricked or made to look like a fool.

The Portal Network

Millennia after Thrumbolg claimed the citadel, the questions of who built Mag Tureah's portals, how they function, the reason for their instability, and the purpose they originally served remain unanswered. Some scholars have noted disquieting similarities between the functioning of the portals and the way in which aberrations traverse the planes. The only consistent fact is that each portal connects to an abandoned ruin in the mortal realm.

The sheer number and transitory nature of these portals makes them all but impossible to catalog. Characters who are interested in the portals can detect any open portal in their vicinity by making moderate DC Arcana checks. An open portal can typically be found every thousand feet in Mag Tureah's outer reaches, but they are more numerous in its deeper vaults. When detected, a portal remains open in both directions for 1d10 rounds. After a portal closes, a character can attempt a hard DC Arcana check as a standard action to reopen it from the Mag Tureah side for 1 additional round. There are no guarantees that a reopened portal's destination will remain the same.

Using Mag Tureah's portals is a risky proposition, since few connect to the same destination more than once. (Some exceptions exist, but these portals are heavily guarded and extremely unreliable.) No one can be sure what hostile environment or monsters wait on the other side of a portal. If a character decides to step through, roll on the Random Portal Destinations table or select an isolated locale appropriate for your campaign.

RANDOM PORTAL DESTINATIONS

d12	Destination
1	A ruined castle of glass atop an earthmote, a spiral staircase connecting it to the ground.
2	The mouth of a flooded cavern, the beginning of an undersea road paved with huge stones.
3	A partially toppled circle of stone menhirs overgrown by jungle vines.
4	A gargantuan statue buried in desert sand up to its monstrous head.
5	An abandoned dragon's aerie perched on the lip of an active volcano.
6	A temple to a long-dead god, collapsed to rubble.
7	A forgotten chamber that opens up to the sewers of the largest city on the continent.
8	A tower overlooking a courtyard filled with petrified soldiers standing in neat ranks.
9	A deserted priory sprawling across a rocky tidal island.
10	A crumbling observatory open to the skies above.
11	A covered bridge, woven from the roots of living trees, over a murky river.
12	A frozen city built on a terraced mountaintop, with no trace of its former inhabitants.

Fragarach

The cyclops that absconded with the broadsword *Fragarach* quickly met a grim end, after which the weapon changed hands many times. Eventually, it came into the possession of the Temple of Elemental Evil,[7] but a party of adventurers returned it to the noble prince who had previously wielded it. In areas where the sword has become legend, numerous lesser magic blades have been forged in its image. Over the centuries, many of these imitations have ended up in Mag Tureah's treasure vaults.

Fragarach is intelligent and communicates empathically with its wielder. It has but one goal: to kill Thrumbolg. To achieve its aim, the sword cajoles its wielder into action with whatever images and feelings will appeal to him or her. It might display visions of Mag Tureah's fabulous treasure vaults to an avaricious character, or show the horrors of the fortress's slave pens to a character who values freedom above all else. The sword has a strong personality, and most of its wielders fall under its sway. They become obsessed with vengeance, develop a brutal "eye for an eye" sense of justice, and compulsively respond to any slight, no matter how minor.

Fragarach Epic Level

This wave-bladed steel broadsword has a hilt of gold and silver wire. Seven emeralds adorn its guard and pommel, their magic imparting an overwhelming desire to slay Thrumbolg, the First Lord of Mag Tureah.

Artifact: Weapon (broadsword)
Enhancement Bonus: +5 to attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +5d8 damage, or +5d12 if the target is a fomorian.

Property
While holding this weapon, you can perform the Planar Portal ritual without expending any components. The destination of the portal is a random portal in Mag Tureah.

Attack Power ✦ At-Will (No Action)
Trigger: You attack with this weapon and miss an enemy that hit you with an attack since the start of that enemy's last turn.
Effect: The enemy takes 5 damage.

Utility Power (Healing) **✦ Daily** (Immediate Interrupt)
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to you hits you with an attack and reduces you to 0 hit points or fewer.
Effect: You can spend a healing surge. You then use an at-will melee weapon attack power with this weapon against the triggering enemy. If you hit, you automatically score a critical hit.

Utility Power ✦ Daily (No Action)
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to you hits you with an attack that subjects you to a condition that a save can end.
Effect: The triggering enemy is subjected to the same condition (save ends). If the triggering enemy ends the condition before you do, the condition also ends on you.

Adventure Hooks

Thrumbolg, Mag Tureah, and *Fragarach* can be incorporated into your game through a number of plot hooks suggested here.

- While exploring ancient ruins, the characters inadvertently pass through a portal to Mag Tureah. After the portal closes behind them, they have no choice but to brave the dangers of the First Lord's realm. As they explore the Feydark, they witness firsthand the horrors that befall Thrumbolg's slaves. Alternatively, the heroes could begin their careers as slaves, with their first adventures built around engineering their escape.
- A magic broadsword with an amethyst-studded hilt is among the items found in a treasure hoard. Known as *Rebutter*,[8] it is one of the legendary swords forged in *Fragarach's* image, and its appearance draws Thrumbolg's attention. Since he cannot risk the original *Fragarach* falling into his enemies' hands, he dispatches powerful fey assassins to ascertain the blade's true power, slay its newest owner, and retrieve the sword.
- After millennia, Thrumbolg has finally asserted control over a significant number of Mag Tureah's portals. Now, his armies mass outside his fortress, preparing to invade the unsuspecting mortal realm. To make matters worse, Thrumbolg has convinced his fellow fomorian lords to join forces with him. In desperation, the Court of Stars calls on a group of powerful mortal heroes to find *Fragarach*, infiltrate Mag Tureah, and disrupt the burgeoning fomorian coalition by slaying the First Lord.
- Mag Tureah's original builders have finally called on Thrumbolg to fulfill his end of their pact. Unwilling or unable to do so, the First Lord desperately bargains with his enemies, including the adventurers. In return for their assistance in battling these mysterious entities, Thrumbolg promises a thousand years of peace. Intrigued, the Court of Stars dispatches a group of champions to fight alongside the adventurers.

Notes

1. *Underdark*, page 104.
2. *Manual of the Planes*™, page 44.
3. *Underdark*, page 14.
4. *Draconomicon*™*: Chromatic Dragons*, page 197.
5. *Monster Manual*® 3, page 106.
6. *Dragon* 405, "Character Themes: Born from the Feywild."
7. T1–4, *The Temple of Elemental Evil*, pages 86 and 126.
8. T1–4, *The Temple of Elemental Evil*, page 127.

About the Authors

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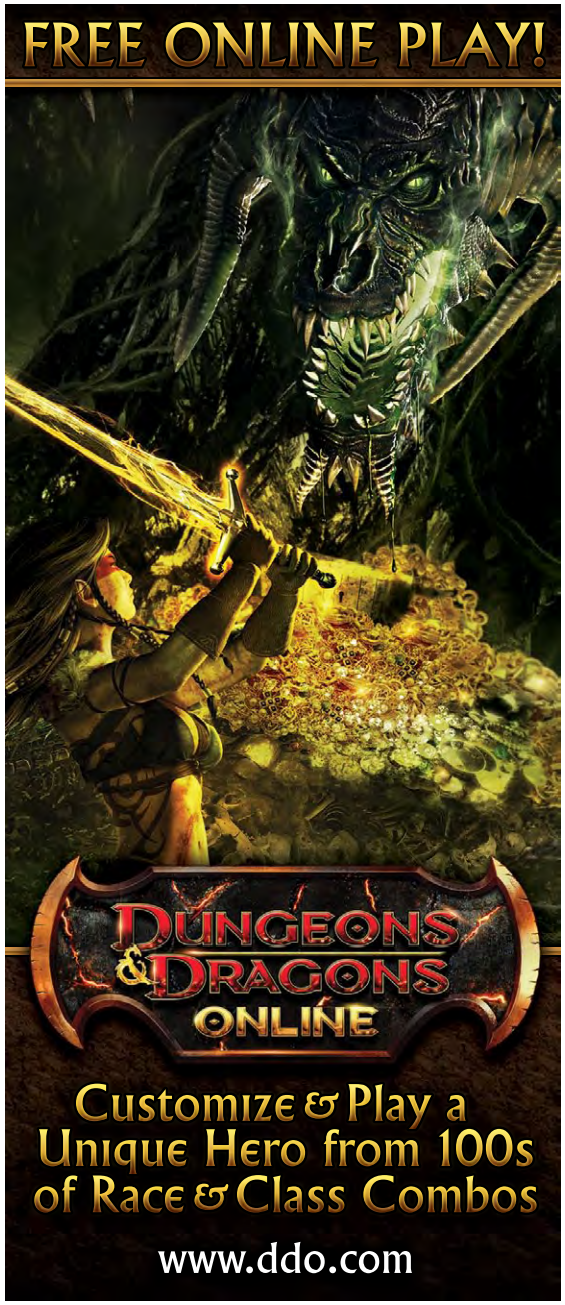

Character Themes: Driven By Ambition

By Doug Hyatt

Illustration by Jesper Ejsing

Arcane power manifests in a vast number of ways, and an equal number of specialists are among its practitioners. Some, known as beguilers, embrace the power of illusion, and they vanish as pursuers close in or they shift their features to blend into a crowd. Occultists use magic as a tool to acquire knowledge, foretelling the future with implements of divination such as tarot cards or crystal balls, or binding summoned extraplanar entities into their service. Both sorts of arcane specialists are motivated by the same impulse: ambition.

Such characters have enormous egos and supreme confidence in their abilities. Even those from modest beginnings never see themselves as ordinary. Early in their careers, beguilers view everyone else as potential marks. Lured by the prospect of lasting fame and glory, they pursue ever more powerful foes in their quest to practice the ultimate deception. Similarly, occultists carry with them a sense of destiny, as though the secrets of the cosmos are owed to them. In their thirst to decode such secrets, they attempt to coerce or bargain with dangerous beings such as demons and devils.

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CHARACTER THEMES

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore," the first article in this series, in *Dragon* 399.

If you choose the beguiler or the occultist theme for your character, try to embrace the overwhelming sense of confidence and thirst for power that drives them. You might be a laughing gnome beguiler who enjoys flashy deceptions, or a haughty tiefling occultist who broods over the mysteries that yet elude you.

This overconfidence can quickly get such characters in danger. A beguiler could face an opponent he or she cannot trick. An occultist might summon a creature well beyond his or her ability to cajole or control. Ambition always has a price.

Beguiler

Beguilers aspire to become masters of deception in all its forms. Consummate practical jokers, they delight in playing tricks even on their closest friends. A beguiler might be a master spy, able to slip into the shadows of an alley to evade a bothersome patrol, or a glib-tongued charmer who cons a wealthy merchant out of priceless jewels. Unattended valuables have a way of mysteriously disappearing in a beguiler's presence; those that are carefully watched are simply more of a challenge.

Beguilers struggle to tell the truth at the best of times. The stories they recount feature outlandish embellishments: The small drake vanquished by the beguiler's adventuring party is likely to become a massive red dragon somewhere around the third retelling. Succeeding with one lie just encourages the beguiler to try another, more outrageous one.

The greater the level of skill required to pull off a deception, the more likely a beguiler is to attempt it, just to see what he or she can get away with. Should a patron challenge one to pull off a difficult heist, or to deceive an entire town with a near-impossible illusion, the beguiler will pursue the assignment obsessively, to the exclusion of all else.

Beguilers often find employment as spies or thieves. Most possess a smattering of skills useful to such occupations: the crafting of disguises, the ability to disarm traps and pick troublesome locks, and the training to tread quietly without drawing attention. Able to think quickly on their feet, beguilers can lie readily and convincingly should they be discovered in an indelicate situation. Unlike most traditional spies, however, many beguilers also possess a strong affinity for mind-altering magic (including bards, or wizards specializing in illusion or enchantment) or a strong connection to the Shadowfell (such as assassins and nethermancers). Whether conjuring an illusory wall of fog to secure their escape, or implanting a simple magical suggestion in a guard, beguilers frequently use arcane trickery to succeed in their goals.

Most covert operators aim to get away clean and finish the task with none the wiser. Beguilers, however, take great pride in their grandiose deceptions and want the world to know what they have accomplished—not just that they succeeded, but how they did it. Thus, a beguiler might leave a calling card after stealing an enchanted sword from a supposedly impregnable vault, or imprint a unique signature on a masterful illusion, such as a fake volcanic eruption that evacuates a nearby town.

Beguilers place great importance on their reputations, and many acquire followers who admire their exploits. They delight in building an entourage that hangs on their every word. As they rise in stature, beguilers seek to acquire apprentices from the ranks of amateur thieves and illusionists drawn to their growing legend—though such a master never reveals all his or her secrets. Ironically for those so adept at deceiving others, beguilers are often vulnerable to flattery from sycophantic devotees.

Creating a Beguiler

Anyone with a penchant for illusion or trickery can become a beguiler. Members of stealthy classes such as rogues, assassins, vampires, and monks sometimes follow this path, as do those more versed in arcane magic, such as wizards (illusionists, enchanters, nethermancers), warlocks, and bards. Halflings, gnomes, and humans are most commonly beguilers, but members of all races can be drawn to the art of deception.

Starting Feature

All beguilers acquire some small proficiency with arcane magic, able to create simple illusions such as hypnotic flashes of light or sudden patches of darkness. You can distract a single opponent with a luminescent flare. In addition, you have learned to channel your illusions through crystalline orbs.

Benefit: You gain proficiency with orbs.

In addition, you gain the *beguiling flash* power.

Beguiling Flash Beguiler Attack

You create a sudden flash of light that temporarily confuses your foe so that it cannot easily find you.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Illusion, Implement
Minor Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Highest ability modifier vs. Will
Hit: You slide the target up to 3 squares. Until the end of your next turn, you have partial concealment from the target.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

In their capacity as spies and thieves, beguilers must often slip unnoticed into enemy territory. They depend on their magical knowledge to craft ever more elaborate illusions. You have become more accomplished at both of these tasks.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Arcana checks and Stealth checks.

Level 10 Feature

A beguiler who remains hidden from enemies enjoys greater power over them. You have learned how to impose stronger effects than normal on your opponents while you remain cloaked in the shadows.

Benefit: If you miss an enemy with an arcane attack power while you have any concealment from that enemy, you gain a +2 power bonus to the next attack roll you make against it before the end of your next turn.

Optional Powers

Beguiler powers center around the use of arcane magic to deceive others and remain hidden from notice, often incorporating dark cloaks (the finer material, the better) into their garb. You have become adept at using illusions to hide from your foes.

Level 2 Power

Beguilers can employ an illusion similar to that provided by a *cloak of displacement*. You suddenly are not quite where you appear to be, and you can get the drop on your unsuspecting opponent.

Cloaking Feint Beguiler Utility 2

With a quick flourish, you convince an opponent that you aren't really where it thinks you are.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Illusion
Minor Action **Ranged 10**
Target: One creature
Effect: Make an Arcana check. If the check result beats the target's passive Insight, you gain combat advantage and partial concealment against the target until the end of your next turn.

Level 6 Power

Beguilers use magic to enhance their skill at deception. You can sustain an illusion that enhances an existing disguise and makes others less likely to notice objects you have concealed on your person.

Trickster Veil Beguiler Utility 6

With a nearly perfect disguise, no one can see your true face—or the dagger hidden in your boot.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Illusion
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: For the next hour, whenever you make a Bluff or Thievery check, you can roll twice and use the higher result.

Level 10 Power

The most powerful illusion in a beguiler's arsenal is the ability to disappear in plain sight. Just as your foes are closing in, with a swirl of cloth you evaporate into the darkness.

Vanishing Swirl Beguiler Utility 10

As your enemy draws near, you spin away and disappear into thin air.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Illusion
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: An enemy moves adjacent to you.
Effect: You become invisible until the start of your next turn, and you shift up to 2 squares.

Occultist

Occultists believe the cosmos is trying to tell them something. They see signs everywhere—in the arrangement of leaves upon a pond, the flight of birds, or the positions of the constellations in the night sky—and work diligently to decipher their meaning. Many occultists also dabble in numerology, seeing mathematics as but one of the languages by which the enigmatic forces of creation seek to communicate. Every crypt explored, every ritual mastered, every ancient text translated leads an occultist closer to unlocking the mysteries of the multiverse.

Highly sought after for their ability to divine meaning from even the most mundane objects, occultists might advise powerful individuals or even whole settlements. Some serve as royal astrologers and foretell the consequences of future actions from the patterns of the stars. Others are village augurs, determining the outcome of the harvest by examining the entrails of sacrificial animals. A few set up shop as fortune-tellers, reading tea leaves or prophesying through the use of cards or crystal balls. Many occultists do not possess genuine powers of foresight but rely instead on observation and shrewd deduction to do "cold reading" on their subjects. Some do master and perform divination rituals, however, such as Hand of Fate, in their endless pursuit of knowledge.

Although a few occultists remain in one place, most choose to travel throughout the realms. They are fascinated by ancient civilizations and eagerly seek out archeological sites to learn the secrets of the past.

The ruins of a once-great city, the tomb of a long-dead emperor, the abandoned castle of a vanished regent, or a vast underground library filled with decaying tomes—the occultist greets each with wonder and a voracious appetite for knowledge.

Occultists apprentice themselves to willing masters, but they also attempt to bind powerful creatures to their service. In their quest to understand the nature of existence, they do not let abstract concepts such as morality stand in their way. They are just as likely to study a fiendish prince as they are a celestial servitor, although the former is more likely to kill the student than to impart any wisdom.

When dealing with powerful extraplanar entities, be they demons, primordials, or agents of deities, occultists learn to tread carefully. They scour the realms for arcane and divine rituals, collecting items such as sorcerous dust and blessed candles that can be incorporated into rituals to create warding circles. In this way they can safely imprison unwilling subjects, or bargain with the dark forces they summon without losing their heads in the process.

Creating an Occultist

Anyone who seeks to interpret the meaning of the universe through signs and symbols can become an occultist. Wizards and clerics of deities such as Ioun, Gond, or Oghma are typical, since they possess the required skills to understand ancient texts and obscure arcana. Warlocks (such as binders and hexblades) are also common, with their penchant for forging pacts or striking deals with dark forces. Although occultists can come from any race, they are most often tieflings, gnomes, and humans.

Starting Feature

Through long and careful study, occultists have learned the theory of summoning and binding dangerous creatures. Your extensive knowledge of glyphs and sigils allows you to draw circles of power to keep dark forces at bay.

Benefit: You gain proficiency with tomes.

You can master and perform rituals in the binding category as though you had the Ritual Caster feat.

In addition, you gain the *sign of the golden ram* power.

Sign of the Golden Ram Occultist Attack

You draw a sigil on the ground that repels your enemies.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Zone
Standard Action **Close** burst 2
Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. Until the effect ends, you can use the secondary power at will.

Secondary Power (Arcane, Implement)
Opportunity Action **Close** burst 2
Trigger: An enemy enters the zone or starts its turn there.
Target: The triggering enemy
Attack: Highest ability modifier vs. Will
Hit: Highest ability modifier damage, and you push the target up to 3 squares from the zone's origin square.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Occultists spend many hours engaged in the study of spells, rituals, arcane esoterica, and religious ceremonies. You have increased knowledge of such matters.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Arcana checks and Religion checks.

Level 10 Feature

Occultists perform extensive research on creatures they intend to bargain with or bind. You can use this knowledge to your advantage, whether it be the proper etiquette for speaking to a demon or primordial, or familiarity with such beings' weaknesses or desires.

Benefit: When interacting with creatures that have an origin other than natural, you can use Arcana or Religion in place of Diplomacy and Intimidate. Once per day, you can ignore the component cost of a binding ritual of your level or lower that you have mastered.

Optional Powers

Occultists scour tomes and scrolls for esoteric lore. Obsessed with magical knowledge, the secrets of existence, and the power inherent in certain symbols, they delve ever deeper into the forbidden regardless of peril to body, mind, or soul. With each new secret revealed, an occultist's power grows.

Level 2 Power

Occultists study numerology to gain access to the larger pattern of reality. Using unearthed manuscripts and your accumulated knowledge, you can predict the future and expend personal energy to twist that pattern and shift fortune in your favor. Doing so comes at a cost, since the cosmos resists such meddling.

Twisting Fortune Occultist Utility 2

Your foreknowledge allows you to expend personal energy to change the odds in your favor.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, whenever you make an attack roll, check, or saving throw, you can spend a healing surge but regain no hit points. Instead, you reroll the attack roll, check, or saving throw three times, taking the highest result.

Level 6 Power

Most occultists use binding rituals to call up and compel otherworldly creatures to aid them. Such creatures might impart information, perform services, or undertake some action. Your study of binding rituals helps you develop a simple spell to call forth a lesser demon or devil to assist you when confronted with a challenge.

Fiendish Oracle — Occultist Utility 6

You draw a diagram on the ground and call on a minor fiend to assist you.

Daily ✦ Arcane
Standard Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must use this power during an extended rest or a short rest.
Effect: You spend a healing surge but regain no hit points. Instead, you call forth the awareness of a fiend and ask up to three questions of it. For each question, make a check with a bonus of 5 + one-half your level + your highest ability modifier against a DC the DM secretly sets.

On a successful check, the fiend gives a truthful answer. If the check fails, or the DM decides the fiend cannot know the information, the answer is a lie.

You also gain a +2 power bonus to all knowledge checks until you reach the next milestone or take an extended rest.

Level 10 Power

Extensive use of binding rituals exposes occultists to great danger, since many creatures called are resentful and destructive. Thus, they first take precautions to ward themselves against attack. You can use your experience to keep enemies from reaching you and your allies.

Circle of Antipathy — Occultist Utility 10

Your hastily inscribed hermetic circle flares, creating a barrier to hedge out your enemies.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Implement, Zone
Standard Action **Close** burst 2
Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. While in the zone, you and your allies gain a +4 power bonus to all defenses against attacks that originate outside the zone. Moving into a square in the zone costs an enemy 4 extra squares of movement.
Sustain Minor: The zone persists until the end of your next turn.

About the Author

Doug Hyatt is the author of several recent articles in *Dragon* and *Dungeon*, including "Seekers of the Moonrise Vanguard" in *Dragon* 413, and "Unfriendly Skies" in *Dungeon* 205. He is a computational biologist living in Tennessee. In his spare time, he enjoys chess, *Dominion*, and *Magic: The Gathering*®. You can follow him on Twitter as @doug_hyatt.

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Unearthed Arcana:
Unfinished Business

By Andrew Schneider and Robert J. Schwalb

Illustration by Eva Widermann

Of all the undead threats found in the world, ghosts are among the most diverse. Ghosts can be mad, wicked, shrieking horrors that embody all mortal fears of what lies beyond. They can also be guides, helpers, protectors, advisors, and benevolent spirits trapped between worlds. Does a ghost haunt a lethal trap to lure other creatures to their doom, or to warn away the unwary from taking that final step?

The potential to become a ghost lies in every mortal creature—even adventurers. Death not need be an end for your character; it can be a beginning. Whether you want to continue the story of a living adventurer who fell afoul of a monster's attack, a trap, or some other peril, or play a character from beyond the grave who joins forces with the living, the rules presented here let you explore the world from a new perspective, between the living and the dead.

As with any Unearthed Arcana article, this content is highly experimental and might not be appropriate for all campaigns. Ghosts have considerable advantages over living and corporeal allies, and your DM might consider them to be too powerful for his or her game.

Ghostly Existence

Any mortal creature might become a ghost. Adventurers have reported encounters with ghostly hounds whose barking and baying chill the bone. Others have run across the shades of beautiful elf maidens, so tormented by their undead state that their shrieks can stop a beating heart. Even horrific monsters such as beholders might rise in ghostly form.

Still, extraordinary circumstances are required for a soul to refuse Letherna's call and linger in the world. Often, a disembodied spirit resists moving on due to unfinished business in life: a crucial quest unfulfilled, a responsibility not upheld, a duty not honored. Like anchors, these memories weigh on the ghost and force it to remain, at least until whatever troubles it has been resolved.

The Shadowfell can also form ghosts from the newly dead. Shadow's subtle influence can awaken memories, emotions, and sensations that quicken the spirit and prevent it from finding peace. Ghosts twisted by such power grow to resent and even hate the living, and in time they might lose all traces of their mortal existence, becoming vengeful wraiths.

Finally, rare individuals with strong personalities, great magical power, or an extraordinary ability can cheat death through sheer force of will. They refuse to move on, unmoved by the Raven Queen's demands. Such ghosts are the most powerful and feared of their kind, for they go wherever and do whatever they please.

Regardless of the reasons for their formation or the powers they possess, all ghosts gradually fade away. The longer a ghost remains, the more tenuous its hold becomes on who it was. Memories disappear.

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Familiar faces become strangers. Important places lose their prominence. As the centuries pass, more and more of the ghost's identity is lost, until it forgets its former life and knows only its undead existence.

All ghosts are hard to kill, coalescing into their former shape hours or days after their apparent destruction. The only way to put a ghost to rest for certain is to finish whatever task binds it to the world. Even then, some ghosts refuse to move on. The more baleful spirits might be banished only by breaking their connection to the Shadowfell, or by overcoming the magic that defies death's call.

Playing a Ghost

You can create a ghost as a new character or turn an existing character into a ghost when he or she dies. Regardless of how you use these rules, this existence should never be an ordinary choice, like whether to play an elf or a dwarf. Being a ghost is a special and uncommon state of existence you should be ready to explain before you introduce your undead character to your companions.

Creating a New Ghost

Ghosts join new or established adventuring groups for a variety of reasons. You can use any of the following examples as your character's motivation for joining the group, or create one of your own.

Haunted Item: Many ghosts haunt particular locations, but some instead have a connection to certain objects. You have a psychic bond with an item a player character carries. You might have owned this item in life, created the item, or been slain by it. Something about the item, or the character who now owns it, stirred your spirit into consciousness. You follow the item wherever it goes and are loath to let it out of your sight.

Vanquished Enemy: You are the ghost of someone the player characters killed. Perhaps you have no recollection of how you died, but you know the adventurers are important to you in some way. Or you might remember them and seek to make amends for your misdeeds and villainy. This option is a strong choice if you're joining a well-established party. The characters could be slow to trust you, though—if they do so at all. Although such tension can help create memorable roleplaying scenes, this option might not be appropriate for all groups.

Watchful Relation: You have a connection to a living player character. You might be a parent, sibling, or family friend, and you feel a responsibility to watch over the character and offer advice, protection, and assistance. The person could have a special destiny, be committed to completing a quest you began when you were alive, or simply be someone you loved a great deal.

Becoming a Ghost

Converting an existing character to a ghost is an excellent option when being raised from the dead is not possible. Not every being comes back as a ghost, however, so you should work with your DM to come up with a suitable reason. The following examples are intended as starting points.

When you rise as the ghost of a dead character, you appear in an unoccupied space nearest to where you died, at a time of the DM's choosing. Manifestation can be instantaneous, or it can take hours, days, or even years.

Dazed and Confused: Sudden, unexpected death can cause the soul to become disoriented, unwilling to believe it has died. You might linger for a time as a ghost until you come to terms with your demise. Your spirit might persist for one adventure or several.

Unfinished Business: Player characters might become ghosts if they die before completing an important quest. Your commitment to the cause is too great to let death stop you. Your status as a ghost lasts only until the quest is complete; then you move on.

Dark Circumstances: Unusual situations can give rise to a character's transformation into a ghost. For example, if you died on the Shadowfell, your soul might have become suffused with shadow energy. A vile spell might have ripped your soul from your body before death took you. Perhaps a curse barred your soul from its ultimate fate, dooming you to restless eternity unless you can find a way to escape or overcome the wicked magic.

Roleplaying a Ghost

Even in a world populated with crystal beings, demon spawn, and minotaurs, ghosts are scary. They remind people of their own mortality. With your deathly, ethereal form and odd behavior, you can expect screams instead of greetings wherever you go.

Your appearance is disturbing. The connections that bind you to the world also influence your physical appearance. As a newly formed ghost, you look much as you did during the last moments of life. You might sport horrific wounds, appear old and haggard, have a face frozen in a rictus of pain or terror, or otherwise demonstrate the cause of your death. Your memories manifest the clothing you wore in life, including armor and jewelry, and you carry the same equipment, albeit wispy and ethereal. After a time, you learn to distance yourself from your death and can assume a less disturbing appearance.

You remember—mostly. Just as you physically resemble your living form, so too do you retain your normal mannerisms, at least for a while. Your personality, morals, goals, and objectives might remain as they did in life, though being dead can render certain motivations less important. For example, physical wealth no longer has the practical appeal that it does to the living. Your memory is fuzzy at best, so you might forget small details, the names of other characters, locations, or specific events.

You are plagued by visions. Becoming a ghost is traumatic, both as a result of dying and because of

what you encounter on the other side. You stand in two worlds and might experience strange visions while in this state if your DM so chooses. They could be mere hallucinations, or they might be messages from other trapped spirits.

You can play up your distraction from these visions, perhaps looking around as if you saw something out of the corner of your eye, or laughing or grunting as if in response to someone speaking.

Ghost Traits

To make a new ghost, create a character as normal and then apply the following traits. If an existing character becomes a ghost, modify his or her statistics by applying these ghost traits.

As a ghost, you retain all the racial traits, class features, and powers you had in life. The ghost traits gained last only as long as you remain a ghost and are lost if you return to life.

Maximum Hit Points: Reduce your maximum hit points to your bloodied value. Then, recalculate your bloodied value from your new maximum hit point total.

Healing Surges: Your number of healing surges becomes 2.

Senses: You have darkvision.

Ghostly Presence: You have a +4 racial bonus to Stealth checks.

Undead: You are not a living creature. Effects that specifically target living creatures do not work on you. You do not eat, drink, breathe, or sleep. You are also immune to disease.

Insubstantial: You take half damage from all attacks, except those that deal force or psychic damage.

Limited Phasing: You ignore difficult terrain. In addition, you can move up to 1 square into a solid object large enough to accommodate a creature of your size. While in an object, you can move only if you leave the object; you have line of sight and line of effect to no creature, and no creature has line of sight or line of effect to you.

Rejuvenation: When you drop to 0 hit points or fewer, your ghostly form dissolves into ectoplasm, a residue some incorporeal creatures leave behind when they touch objects or are destroyed. You are removed from play. If you have any healing surges to spend, you can do so at the end of a short rest, reappearing with the appropriate number of hit points. Otherwise, at the end of each hour, make a saving throw. If you succeed, you reappear with your full normal hit points. In any case, when you reappear, you do so in the space you last occupied or the nearest unoccupied space to it of your choice.

Equipment: Upon becoming a ghost, your memory creates insubstantial versions of the equipment you carried when you were alive. If you drop any of these items or give one to another creature, the item loses coherency and dissolves into ectoplasm. As a standard action, you can re-create that item so it rejoins your possessions.

You cannot pick up or manipulate physical objects, so you cannot add new items to your equipment or benefit from them. You can, however, benefit from alternative rewards that do not take physical forms.

Inherent Bonuses: You use the fixed enhancement bonus (inherent bonus) system described in *Dungeon Master's Guide® 2* and the *Dark Sun® Campaign Setting*.

Powers: You retain all the attack powers and utility powers you had when you were alive. Your ghostly state imposes a few modifications to how you use these powers.

Attacks: Any power you know that normally targets AC instead targets Reflex. You take a –2 penalty to attack rolls using such powers.

Damage: Whenever you would deal untyped damage, you instead deal necrotic damage or psychic damage (your choice).

Ghost Powers

Becoming a ghost grants you several powers that reflect your undead nature. When you become a ghost, you gain all the following powers of your level or lower. These powers are common to all ghost player characters and are lost if the character returns to life. In addition, the manner of your death confers a related special ability, so you gain one feature from those described under "Cause of Death."

Level 1: Corrupting Touch

Although ghosts lack substance, mere contact with an unbound spirit can corrupt the soul of a living creature, causing it to sicken and possibly die. Even if the creature survives the touch, the pain is excruciating, so much so that the target becomes more susceptible to other attacks.

Benefit: You gain the *corrupting touch* power.

Corrupting Touch Ghost Attack 1

You reach into a creature's body to disrupt it.

At-Will ✦ Necrotic, Shadow
Standard Action **Melee** 1
Target: One creature
Attack: Level + 3 vs. Reflex
Level 11: Level + 5 vs. Reflex
Level 21: Level + 7 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 necrotic damage, and the target gains vulnerable 1 to all damage until the end of your next turn.
Level 21: 2d10 necrotic damage, and the target gains vulnerable 3 to all damage until the end of your next turn.
Special: You can use this power in place of a melee basic attack.

Level 1: Stolen Years

Ghosts drain life energy from living creatures they touch, stealing years away from the living. A creature subject to this effect undergoes a brief transformation,

growing old and infirm for a moment before resuming its normal appearance.

Stolen Years Ghost Attack 1

You drain life from another creature to sustain your undead existence.

Encounter ✦ Shadow
No Action **Personal**
Trigger: You hit an enemy with *corrupting touch*.
Target: The enemy you hit.
Effect: The target is weakened (save ends), and you gain a healing surge.

Level 4: Ethereal Retreat

As a ghost, you exist only partly in the natural world. When threatened, you can withdraw deeper into your shadowy existence so other creatures cannot see you.

Ethereal Retreat Ghost Utility 4

You withdraw from the world, fading away until you disappear.

Encounter ✦ Healing, Shadow
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Requirement: You must have at least one healing surge.
Trigger: You take damage.
Effect: You spend a healing surge, regaining hit points as normal. In addition, you become invisible and cannot attack until the end of your next turn or until you take a minor action to become visible.
Sustain Minor: You remain invisible and cannot attack until the end of your next turn or until you take a minor action to become visible.

Level 6: Malevolence

You can possess living creatures. You expend a measure of your energy to shoulder aside the target's spirit, replacing it with your own. Until your target forces you out, you control it as if it were your puppet.

Malevolence Ghost Attack 6

You occupy another creature and take control of its body.

Encounter ✦ Charm, Shadow
No Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must have at least one healing surge.
Trigger: You hit an enemy with *corrupting touch*.
Target: The enemy you hit.
Effect: You spend a healing surge but regain no hit points. Instead, you move into the target's space, and the target is dominated (save ends). While the target is dominated by you, you are removed from play, but you still determine the target's actions.
Aftereffect: You return to play in an unoccupied space adjacent to the target.

Level 8: Walk Through Walls

Your memories of being alive and the rules reality imposed on you as a living creature prevent you from fully embracing the freedom of insubstantiality. Only by shedding your mortal ties can you truly go where you wish.

Walk Through Walls Ghost Utility 8

Letting go of your mortal ties alters your perceptions so that physical boundaries are nothing to you.

Encounter ✦ Shadow
Free Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must have at least one healing surge.
Trigger: You start your turn.
Effect: You spend a healing surge but regain no hit points. Instead, you are phasing until the end of the encounter.

Cause of Death

Dying is traumatic to the spirit, and the experience stays with a newly formed ghost, shaping its existence and capabilities. When you become a ghost, you gain one of the following features. Choose the one that best fits the manner of your death.

Corrupting Gaze

You saw your death in another's eyes, and your own eyes have become windows to what lies beyond. Creatures that meet your gaze recoil in horror as their instinct of self-preservation causes them to avoid what they glimpsed.

Requirement: You must have been killed by a gaze effect.

Benefit: You gain the *corrupting gaze* power.

Corrupting Gaze Ghost Attack

You blast a living creature with a glance, your baleful gaze shattering its mind.

At-Will ✦ Fear, Psychic, Shadow
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature you can see
Attack: Level + 3 vs. Reflex
Level 11: Level + 5
Level 21: Level + 7
Hit: 1d12 psychic damage, and the target can take actions only during its turn until the end of your next turn.
Level 21: 2d12 psychic damage.
Special: You can use this power in place of a ranged basic attack.

Draining Touch

Shadow energy lingers in your undead form, an echo of the attack that killed you. You can channel this dark power into creatures you touch to speed them to the grave.

Requirement: You must have been killed by necrotic damage.

Benefit: You have resist 10 necrotic.

In addition, you gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls with *corrupting touch*, and targets weakened by your *stolen years* power take a –2 penalty to saving throws made to end the weakened condition.

Frightful Moan

You can loose a banshee wail that unravels your enemies' courage and sends them fleeing. The sound reverberates around you, carrying with it all the loss and sorrow death entails.

Requirement: You must have been killed by a psychic or thunder attack, or by an ally's attack.

Benefit: You gain the *frightful moan* power.

Frightful Moan Ghost Attack

Fear consumes all who hear your mournful cry.

Encounter ✦ Fear, Shadow
Standard Action **Close** burst 2
Requirement: You must have at least one healing surge.
Effect: You spend a healing surge but regain no hit points.
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Level + 2 vs. Will
Level 11: Level + 4
Level 21: Level + 6
Hit: The target is dazed until the end of your next turn, and on the target's next turn, it must use its move action to move as far away from you as it can.

Horrific Appearance

Many ghosts display the cause of their death in their undead forms. The more horrific the end, the more disturbing the ghost's appearance becomes. You learn how to magnify the image of your death to terrorize your opponents.

Requirement: You must have been killed by a disfiguring attack (such as from acid, fire, or lightning) or by a painful or terrifying experience (for example, torture, drowning, or suffocating).

Benefit: You gain the *horrific appearance* power.

Horrific Appearance Ghost Attack

You amplify the dreadful cause of death in your appearance and drive your foes mad.

Encounter ✦ Fear, Shadow
Standard Action **Close** burst 2
Requirement: You must have at least two healing surges.
Effect: You spend two healing surges but regain no hit points.
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Level + 2 vs. Will
Level 11: Level + 4
Level 21: Level + 6
Hit: The target is stunned until the end of your next turn.

Poltergeist

You focus your will to move and manipulate objects and create ghostly sounds. Player character ghosts typically have this feature if the manner of their death does not fit one of the others described in this section.

Benefit: You gain the *ghost sound* and *mage hand* cantrips if you don't have them already. You can use *ghost sound* as a minor action, and the spectral hand created by *mage hand* is invisible to all creatures other than you.

The Next Step

The novelty of being a ghost is bound to wear off. At some point you must decide whether to move on to whatever awaits your soul, return to the world of the living, or linger as a ghost.

Back among the Living: If you plan to return to life, you need your body, preferably intact. Raise Dead requires at least part of a corpse, for example. Time is also a factor; most magic can affect only the recently dead, though a Gentle Repose ritual can preserve your flesh (and prevent unwanted animation). It's always a good idea to keep your body safe and secure until you can gather the resources to come back from the dead.

Upon your return, you remember your existence as a ghost. In game terms, this means you keep any experience points you earned, as well as levels, feats, and race or class powers you gained. You lose all ghost traits, powers, and features.

Lingering On: If you intend to remain a ghost, your body can be a significant liability. A diabolic necromancer who finds your corpse might animate it as a mindless undead horror. Some rituals might use body parts to summon ghosts or compel them to reveal information. Unless you have the means to animate and control your own corpse, your best solution might be to destroy it.

Your ghostly existence continues for a time, but nothing lasts forever. Eventually, your memories fade until you cannot remember anyone or anything from your life. Your values, your beliefs, and finally your personality evaporate. If you don't leave the earthly realm, you will eventually become an undead monster under the DM's control, fated to wander endlessly until ultimately destroyed.

About the Authors

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FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

Alana Nruneree, Unraveler of Secrets

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Aaron Miller

Word is afoot among adventurers in the Heartlands of a beautiful female fey who buys and sells—mainly sells—information about the more secretive wizards and mages' cabals in the Realms. She seems driven by insatiable curiosity . . . but are her aims more sinister?

A Rising Reputation

Scornubel has always been a rather lawless city where traveling traders meet and do business with an ever-increasing resident citizenry of folk once described as "stranger or danger than most other cities can ever boast."[1] Alara Nruneree (pronounced "Ah-*lair*-uh Nuh-*roon*-ree") first rose to notice there as someone who wanted to meet and speak with wizards of all races and backgrounds. She was generally considered a would-be apprentice or a Weavelover,[2] but soon accomplished what many strive to do in Scornubel: make coin by selling what they know. In Alara's case, what she knew was personal details of particular wizards (specific spells and magic items they possessed, their hobbies and interests, their likes and dislikes, and habits) that were of interest to rivals, foes, and individuals desiring to blackmail or steal from a mage.

This knowledge made Nruneree useful but not remarkable, for the Divided City[3] has always been home to wizards, sorcerers, clergy of Mystra and other deities of magic, as well as sages who dealt in dark magical secrets and dubious magical lore.[4]

Alara rose to general Scornubrian attention when a rumor swept the city that she was an agent of the Zhentarim, who sought to measure the true power (and identify the real weaknesses) of all passing wizards for them.

She scornfully denied this rumor—and it was promptly replaced by claims that she was a wizard-watching agent not for the Zhents, but rather for the Red Wizards of Thay.

She denied those claims, too, but was silent when subsequent rumors linked her to certain wizards of Aglarond, or to elf mages active throughout the

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Heartlands. This reticence has led to serious debate about whether she does in fact serve Aglarond or elven patrons, or if she simply grew tired of denying things and found it more useful to let wild rumor bolster her reputation (and therefore, clientele, and in turn, the fees she could charge).

The Blades of the Cauldron

It long ago became the fashion among wizards resident in Scornubel and visiting the Divided City to sneeringly dismiss sages and informants claiming knowledge of mages or the Art; the wizards spoke of and to only each other and Mystra's clergy with respect—but took no stronger action against the "so-called experts in the Art" they derided. This was and is generally held to be wise conduct in Scornubel, a city where "feuds, even small and catty disagreements of mere words, have a habit of getting badly out of hand."[5]

As the years passed, some Scornubrian wizards moved beyond contempt of those selling magical information, into hatred and fear.

In the case of Alara Nruneree, the young and newly arrived (from Calimport) wizard Berendrelak Hjan Kelbrar became convinced that she was only waiting until she had learned every last detail of his research[6] before arranging for his elimination at the hands of whomever she was working for. Kelbrar decided to strike first, and he paid an adventuring band to capture her, telling them to "force answers out of her by any means you desire," and deliver her into his hands.

These adventurers happened to be eight young, bored wealthy second, third, and fourth sons (that is, not heirs) of wealthy Sembian merchant families. They called themselves the Blades of the Cauldron, because they had all been trained as swordsmen, and they founded their band at their preferred Selgauntan tavern, Caerezmur's Cauldron.

The Blades were handsome, dashing, and stylish—and also inexperienced, squeamish lilyhands.[7] In the end, Kelbrar paid them only the first measure or engagement fee of the agreed-upon amount,[8] because they never did bring Nruneree to him.

She was easily found, and she readily consented to sit down with the Blades for a meal and drinks—but they found it hard to get her tipsy. When they grew aggressive in their questioning and didn't allow her to depart, they learned the hard way that she had some magical means of silently summoning aid.

The aid that arrived—swiftly and with devastating effect—was the Dancing Daerrem,[9] six female half-elf acrobatic dancers who often entertained in taverns and festhalls, and were expert knife-throwers. They each bore nine or more sleep-venom-poisoned knives,[10] and they made swift work of the Blades, who awakened in pirate-slavers' chains, constrained under blankets on their way by barge down the Chionthar into lives of hard work in the South.

The daerrem then paid a call on Kelbrar, who was persuaded to hurriedly relocate from Scornubel to Saerloon without violence or further incident.[11]

One of the Blades[12] soon escaped slavery and returned to Scornubel to take vengeance on the daerrem, but instead reached an understanding with them (and ultimately married one of them, the dancer Indrithe Lalathune).

This Blade recalls Alara Nruneree as impish and whimsical, with dancing eyes and a hunger for gossip, secrets, and all manner of magical lore. In his words, she was "quick-witted and sharp-tongued, what our fathers always called 'pert.'" He went on to say that threats made Nruneree angry, not fearful, and she spoke of spells in a way that suggested she had an almost insatiable hunger to feel their magic working on her again, as soon as possible. When the Blades threatened her (as Kelbrar had suggested they do) with shapechanging her into a stone statue and putting her on display in a public place in Scornubel, she reacted with genuine and eager acceptance, and not one shred of fear.

All of the Blades judged Nruneree to be driven by a hunger to learn what wizards and groups of wizards are up to, a delight in knowing details of arcane magic, and a suspicion of all who wield magic, rooted in a belief that wielding magic "does things to the minds of those who handle it, making them truly believe they are special, and deserving of privilege."[13]

What Elminster Knows

Elminster of Shadowdale believes he knows Alara Nruneree quite well, because for some years wizards beholden to him kept her under close observation and reported to him what she said and did.

He is quite confident in saying that contact with magic thrills her, but that she is suspicious of all wizards, believing that many of them use their powers to manipulate rulers high and low, to shape life in the Realms from the shadows.

In this, Elminster asserts, she is of course correct, but the Sage of Shadowdale believes she overestimates the power and influence of wizards and underestimates the power and influence of soldiers, wealth, courtiers, and merchants. (Nruneree believes that everyone secretly bows before mages, out of fear, but Elminster knows better.[14])

Elminster says many bloodlines in the Realms (his own Aumar family included) have an affinity for magic, but that in the vast majority of humans with such a heritage, this talent (for feeling the presence of magic and even gaining some inkling of its nature) is an unreliable, come-and-go-without-warning thing.

Among elves, half-elves, and fey, such talents are far stronger, particularly when dealing with natural magic (nodes, and the spell energy generated by, or clinging to, a place).

Alara Nruneree is one of those rare individuals who has an always-operating *detect magic* ability (of about sixty feet in range, Elminster estimates), and who can "taste" something of the nature of all active magic she encounters.

According to the Scornubrian wizards who spied on her, Nruneree hungers to feel magic cast upon her, and she has a mastery of magic that changes her bodily form. If she is shapechanged by a spell (even a hostile one), she can wrest control of the changes worked on her away from the caster, even overriding the normal effects of the spell. She has the ability to use the spell energy to bring about a (temporary) change to her body that she desires, not what the spellcaster is trying to do to her.

Elminster also believes that Nruneree has an intuitive understanding of magical, physical, and psionic forces that is growing rapidly with her every experience of magic.

He has gone so far as to have dealings with her (in disguise, of course), and he has talked with her enough to learn that she buys and sells information about living wizards—but will covertly share such information, for free, with the authorities or someone else she deems more likely to make good use of it, when it concerns wizards whom she thinks have grown too powerful. Without leaving Scornubel more than she absolutely must, Nruneree actively seeks to thwart the plans of what she calls "overmighty mages." She thinks she can be most effective in this effort by having the rivals of these wizards waste their time and distract them from their projects.

From afar, or hooded and cloaked or in poor lighting, Alara Nruneree can pass for a human female. Yet she is clearly a fey, and although Elminster refuses to reveal all he knows of her background and heritage, he says she has both elf and dryad blood in her ancestry.

The Unraveler of Secrets

Nruneree came up with her "Unraveler" nickname herself, and she promoted herself with it rather than using her name for almost a decade, until it stuck. She was unwittingly aided in this by Scornubrian wizards who used it sarcastically.

In what she calls "daily trade," Nruneree makes no public mention of her mistrust of wizards (saving warnings to be dispensed during private dealings with clients who are willing to pay for what she can tell them about this or that mage), but rather portrays herself as a seeker after "the truth within the mysteries of magic, the splendors that Our Lady of Mysteries [Mystra] shares with us all."

The Unraveler of Secrets is now widely respected as a true expert on wizards and magecraft, who "sees deeply" and knows "as much as many a Holy One of Mystra."[15] She is careful to emphasize her tireless hunt for more lore, in a field that is endless and not to be mastered by any mere mortal, rather than any goal of infallible mastery.

After decades of observing—not to mention spying on, and in several cases actually romancing—them, as well as buying and selling information about them, Nruneree has become an expert on the character of individual Scornubrian wizards, and she has grasped every facet and nuance of what an arcane spellcaster can do with the lower-strength, widely known spells. She can accurately warn of the consequences of casting such magic underwater or in a partially flooded room, or casting it on an undead or dead target rather than a living one. She can make good guesses about what will happen when certain sorts of magic collide and combine in a given space, in battle, and what spells particular wizards—given their past performance (or that of apprentices they have trained)—prefer to use in specific situations.

In short, Elminster asserts, her advice is well worth the few gold pieces she charges for each bit of it she imparts.

He wonders how much longer it will be before one of the overly powerful wizards she desires lessened will consider her a real danger to be swiftly eliminated. He wonders even more what her response to such an attack would be—and whether Scornubel is ready for it. (He strongly suspects she has acquired, and daily carries, magic items more powerful than the enchanted token she broke to summon the Daerrem.)

Notes

1. Various individuals claim to have first spoken or written this "stranger or danger" description, but Elminster says it was likely the sage Erroakrel of Elturel, writing in his annual *The Sword Coast This Summer* "handy wayfaring guide" series of chapbooks, circa 1323 DR. Erroakrel vanished mysteriously from his home in Scornubel in the winter of 1353 DR; the place was found empty, stripped of all belongings (including much wealth), no trace of which has ever been found.

Shortened to just "stranger or danger," this quotation has entered everyday conversation in the Realms; it's used to indicate a choice of two evils or two unknowns, either to mean "It's a toss-up which is worse" or to describe a situation such as a real-world game show contestant might encounter over the choice of door number one or door number two, knowing that something nasty awaits behind at least one door.

2. A Weavelover, in Heartlands parlance, is someone attracted to powerful magic and those who wield it, who desires to become a close companion to such individuals. Usually Weavelovers seek out spellcasters to see magic being unleashed, to personally feel the effects of magic cast on them, and to benefit from keeping company with those who wield it. Some find close proximity to magical energy thrilling or addictive. Others see it just as a swift road to power, or a way of bettering their lot in life.

3. Scornubel has several nicknames, most of them unsavory, but it has been known as the Divided City for centuries, because it stands on both banks of the River Chionthar, connected by frequent ferry service conducted by a variety of private, competing vessels.

Much of the southern part of Scornubel was once known as Zirta, a rival city that was conquered by

Scornubel (in the brief and bloody War of Lords, wherein the five city lords of Scornubel hunted down and slew the seven lords of Zirta).

4. Most storied among these sages of magic are those referred to in lore as Halamadrar of the Three Curses and Loryl the Liar.

Halamadrar was a gruff, always-hooded-and-veiled man rumored to be afflicted by three curses cast on him by mages who were angered by his prying. One of those curses was said to make his body horrid to behold by giving him extra (very small) arms and extra eyes (larger than his own)—all of which "swam" constantly over his outer skin. His speaking sentience ended up in a small metal coffer (a jewel box, some say) and was carried away from the city by caravan merchants; most accounts of Halamadrar's story say it survives to this day.

Loryl became known as the Liar because he told untruths about wizards who had paid him handsomely to spread such falsehoods, so those desiring to attack such wizards relied on the lies and attacked purported weaknesses that were actually strengths. Loryl was eventually decapitated, but a curse cast on him kept his talking head alive in undeath, and it's said to still be in Scornubel, treasured by an unsavory merchant. Local legend disagrees on which one.

5. This quotation comes from the adventurer Anander Bowhund, who came to Scornubel when things grew too hot for him in Amn. He made a living by hiring himself out to factions that wanted to decisively end a feud by escalating it into annihilation of the other side. Because of on-the-job injuries, Bowhund ended up needing several replacement limbs, which were magically provided to him at great expense by the city—with a condition: He was to work henceforth not for private clients, but for the Lords of Scornubel. He now serves as their heavy hand (enforcer), settling disputes, arresting or eliminating individuals "of interest," and escorting and providing protective custody to specific persons, by request of the Lords.

6. Kelbrar's experimentations were intended to improve spells for commanding various bats, lizards, snakes, and flying snakes, so that he or any other wizard using his magics could command multiple creatures much as if they were familiars, without any of them actually being familiars.

7. Across the Realms, a "lilyhands" is a person who doesn't want to dirty one's hands—by doing work, or by undertaking lawless or underhanded "dirty work," or by getting involved in a particular matter at all. "Turning lilyhands" is "washing one's hands" of an affair, abruptly backing out of—or even actually fleeing—something that's turning nasty or difficult.

8. Throughout the Heartlands and the Sword Coast, contracts often have two to four stages of payment, depending on what goods or services are being provided. The "first measure" or "engagement fee" payment binds both parties to the agreement, and it usually provides some written undertaking that the engaged party won't also work in the same endeavor for a rival third party—in other words, if you hire a team to bring you the Flying Diamond or the king's mistress, that group won't entertain other (presumably higher-paying) offers to deliver the Diamond or the mistress to someone else. This first measure payment is forfeit (must be given back) if the engaged party doesn't make an energetic attempt to carry out the contracted action within the term of the agreement. A first measure is usually about a quarter of the full fee contracted for, is rarely more than a third, and is never more than half.

9. A daerrem is a group of women—who need not actually be kin—who work professionally together in a skilled business. Usually the term is used to describe craftworkers rather than performers; it is never applied to adventurers or mercenaries.

10. Their knives were coated with a colorless gel derived from the venom of the dunsnake (or groundsnake, the small brown bird- and amphibian-hunting snake of the Sword Coast) and three ground herbs. Known as "fellswift" because it works on contact, causing instant slumber that rarely lasts for more than a minute, this gel takes a year or more to dry out and lose its efficacy, doesn't dissolve in water, and works only when introduced into the bloodstream (typically through a wound). It can be licked or even consumed in quantity without effect, and it has a distinctive "mint-plus-burnt-bacon" taste.

11. He is said to still flourish in Saerloon, as a reclusive perfecter-of-spells-for-hire and a provider of secure storage for wealth and magic, much in demand among wizards with coin enough to engage his services, thanks to his utter discretion.

12. One Talasker Haladeir, of the wealthy Haladeir fleet-owning and manygoods-merchant house family of Selgaunt.

13. These words come from Haladeir and from one of the daerrem (relating what another of the Blades, one Malamper Narthrond, told her while she was fighting—and questioning—him).

14. As Elminster put it: "Never belittle or discount the sheer stubbornness and belligerence of the common man who will be damned before all the gods before he'll let some wizard in a dirty robe order him about. Coerce him with magic, yes, but command him by threat or assumed authority? Very strongly: No."

15. A "Holy One of Mystra" is a priest of the goddess of magic. The opinions about Nruneree quoted here are commonly held views in Scornubel today.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

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